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## THE AMAZON



*By the same author:*

LET'S SEE IF THE WORLD IS ROUND  
JOURNEY TO THE WORLD'S END  
LAND OF THE CONDOR  
FROM SANTOS TO BAHIA

# THE AMAZON

BY  
HAKON MIELCHE



LONDON      EDINBURGH      GLASGOW  
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*Illustrated by the Author*  
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## FOREWORD

WHAT an appalling business it is writing a book about the Amazon! There is nothing nice about that accursed river and all that can be said about its adventure, of going in peril of one's life, of superhuman exertions and glorious heroism, all that, and much more, has already been written.

I could have written about mighty jungle forests, blazing sunsets and the wild animals I shot dead at the last moment, but it has all been said a hundred times before and a hundred times better, as any reader would soon inform me, did I not know it myself.

And yet, that is what people expect when they buy a book about "the green hell." You see how easily the hackneyed words trip off one's tongue!

Do you know what I have done? I have written the truth about the Amazon, just as I jotted it down in my diary. And here it is with my apologies to all adventure-loving souls.

HAKON MIELCHE.



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## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction to the Amazon*

TUTUYA is nothing in itself.

Two rows of houses at a river's mouth, between them and the bay and the sea a narrow isthmus covered with mangoes and a strip of sand so nearly red-hot that you will not try to walk on it barefoot more than once, unless you were born in Tutuya, when the soles of your feet will have been gradually roasted till the skin has become like leather.

Two rows of low one-storied mud-houses on either side of a white strip of sand sloping down to the river that is called a street. You sink in up to your ankles when you walk down the middle of the street, but only the town's imbecile original does that, and the very few foreigners who stray ashore while their ship lies out in the bay loading.

If you have your wits about you, you do as the natives, and sneak along the narrow strip of shade that is to be found up under the walls of the houses even at mid-day.

Where the street stops, there you will find the government offices and the church. The street makes an effort to appear impressive here, the centre of Tutuya's temporal and spiritual affairs, but like every other effort in this hell of red hot sunshine, it comes to nothing. What was intended to be a market square, peters out in all directions like a damp squib and becomes sand-dunes.

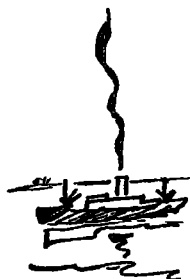




Vultures sit on the ridges of the roofs without even the energy to lift a wing.

In the town's one and only inn you can hear the dull thud of billiard balls. The Army is "playing the Navy."

They are represented in Tutuya by an infantry corporal and a private of the Marines. And then, of course, there is a policeman and a customs official, but neither are on detachment there; they live there permanently, are respectable people with families and so they sleep after lunch and don't go to the inn to drink *cachas* and play snooker.



And yet Tutuya is a tiny name in the world of international shipping, because it has the luck to lie where the river Parana mouths into the Atlantic, just where it forms a bay that is almost sealed from the sea by a sand-bar behind which large ships can lie sheltered from the Atlantic surf and load manioc-flour.

The manioc-flour has a long and laborious way to come, towed in large barges down the river from the interior of the State of Piahy.

Piahy also exports cattle and vegetable oils pressed out of various palm nuts, but that is no concern of ours, as we are only waiting for manioc.

The flour is made from manioc roots, or *Kassava*, as they are also called. It is as fine as potato flour and shining white. It is made of the self-same roots that are used to make *farinha*, the daily fare of the poor Brazilian, a coarse meal that is sprinkled over and kneaded up with every other form of food.

Few foreigners ever get used to it, but those that do learn to eat it, become fanatically fond of it and begin to long for it the moment they are outside the frontiers of Brazil. Genuine tapioca is also made from manioc.

Yes, this spot is of some importance in the international market.

But how can you be in the least interested in all that when you are creeping along by the walls of the houses in Tutuya and, on stopping for a moment, discover that not only your underclothes, shirt, tie and tropical jacket are soaked through with sweat, but that the wet has also worked through the handkerchief in your breast pocket and is now making a dark patch on the outside of the pocket?

It is not swearing when you say that it is hellish hot in Tutuya, but just a sober comparison between two geographical localities.

It is so hot that you cannot even be bothered to smoke.

The inn's beer is so warm that it is nauseating.

Down by the river a human chain is busy emptying a warehouse of its contents of flour sacks and loading them into a waiting barge. Backwards and forwards they go across dipping planks laid from the river bank to the barge.

Seemingly quite unconcerned by the heat, two men pick up a sack weighing 60 kilos and dump it on the head of a third, who at once starts off at a half-run, half-walk, his knees bent and springy, and on to the narrow plank on his way to the barge. An upward heave relieves him of his burden. A white cloud of dust rises up from the bottom of the barge, and before it has settled the next sack is thrown in. And so it goes on hour after hour. A young boy makes quick trips between the warehouse and the village well with two pails of water and a yoke across his shoulders. Most of the men are negroes. But what negroes! The fine, white flour has formed a crust over their black skins. Just here and there the



sweat has furrowed a black stripe down face, chest or back, and their large, red lips are washed clean each time a man bends over the pail of water and drinks in long, wheezing draughts like a thirsty horse.

Chalk-white, muscular bodies; strong faces covered with flour, but with large red mouths. A fantastic pantomime in the dazzling light from the pale-blue, cloudless cyclorama of the sky.

Watching in wonder from the shade of the warehouse, you are amazed at humanity's ability to adjust itself and shudder at the thought of what would happen if Northern European workmen should be sent to relieve them there on those narrow, dipping planks. Not one in a hundred would be able to do eight hours work under such conditions.

The lands between the tropics will never be places where Europeans can undertake physical labour.

We lay four days in Tutuya waiting for a cargo of manioc that was toiling down the Paranahyba River in barges behind a furiously throbbing tub. The little convoy had met with continual bad luck, running on sand banks and fighting with tidal water, and there was nothing else for us to do but to gasp in the shade of the sun-canopy on deck and go at intervals to the saloon to nibble at food, most of which we sent back.

The steward was a man with an inventive mind and sadistic tendencies. He served us baked beans with sliced pork and yellow peas. However, there was cold beer on board and ice-water that washed blissfully against your gums when you bent over the little drinking fountain in one of the long gangways by the way down to the engine room. The stokers going on watch grinned at us, when they saw us standing bowed over the fountain or letting



the ice-water trickle like a benediction over our wrists.

"We're going down to the furnaces to cool off a bit," they would say.

There being nothing to do, our electrician went ashore. We expected him back in the evening, but he didn't come. Nor was he there next morning. We weren't nervous, for in Tutuya it was far too hot for murder.

Our electrician was nicknamed Casanova, a name that he did not shame. And we knew that he had got the customs officer to help him ashore with a case that looked as though it might have held bottles.

It was getting on towards noon when a canoe came zig-zagging out from the river mouth. I have never seen a canoe move in that manner before. The man in the bows, a gigantic, half-naked negro, was standing up to paddle, and even at some distance we could hear that he was singing the "Star-spangled Banner." It was not till they were considerably nearer that we realized that the man in the stern, a skinny little Indian, was vainly trying to sing him down with what we thought must have been meant to be "Happy birthday to you."

When they had come within hail, they asked to speak with "*o capitano.*"

Casanova, we discovered, had made the entire town drunk, except for those of the inhabitants who had not yet reached the age of intemperance.

The two in the canoe had merely come to inform us that a meeting had been held early that morning at which all present had unanimously deposed the old mayor and elected Casanova in his place. Both the Army and the Navy had taken part in the voting, and in Brazil he who has command of army and navy has won any revolution before it even begins. The old mayor evidently saw





nothing improper in this, and we understood that at that moment he and Casanova were sitting with their arms round each other's neck in the billiard room giving three cheers for each other. But the drink was almost at an end.

The two envoys had merely come to ask "*o capitano*" to pack Casanova's things and not to forget the pictures of Betty Grable pinned up on the bulk-head. The keys to the dynamo room and the distributor-boards were hanging on a hook at the side of the cupboard, and might his wages be settled on the spot? Perhaps they could have a case of "Golden Wedding"—or at least six bottles, for what was owing?

Unfortunately the story did not end as fairy-tales about palmy coasts usually do. The first mate decided to take a hand in the political development of the town and carried out a lightening *coup* while the Army and Navy were snoring in their hammocks. We could hear the prodigal even before the boat had rounded the point, for there's no mistaking Casanova's lyrical tenor even at a distance of two sea-miles, not even when he has disguised it under a Portuguese accent and is rendering *Nao tenho lar* with real fervour.

So little happens on a palm coast.

Then one day the tug came with its four lighters in tow, and the boat became a seething ant-hill of white powdered negroes, a chaos of shouts, rattling chains, and whirring winches.

And the next morning everything was ready.

We crossed Tutuya's bar with one foot of water under the keel and escaped safely back into the blue ocean. If the lighters had not arrived the previous day we should have had to choose between sailing without a cargo, or



waiting for the following spring tide at the next full moon.

Three MacCormack boats had already been in the bay after that self-same cargo. We had been lucky. Now, with a good conscience, and, as far as Captain Cudahy was concerned, with considerable relief, we could watch the receding tide breaking like a white comb on the bar further and further astern.

We were pitching in the ocean swell again, and our course was west-north-west, straight for the mouth of the Amazon.

It would be a good twenty-four hours before we should see the Salina lighthouse, which is where the Amazon pilot comes on board.

He had no time to come out to us.

The answer we got when we hoisted the pilot flag was a telegram telling us that his motor-boat had fallen to bits and that we should not expect him till late in the evening. Pilots have a much better time than shipping-owners.

This meant not only that we must lie out there drifting round, but also that we would be unable to catch the tide as we should have, when we reached Belem at the river's mouth. And that meant further delay there.

Captain Cudahy paced backwards and forwards across the red hot iron plates of the deck chewing his good Bahia cigar into a shapeless mass and saying many things that would have made his good Irish Father Confessor straightway disclaim all responsibility and deny him as a fellow countryman.

On shore the pilot was no doubt reclining in a comfortable armchair following the mechanic's not too hurried movements with benevolent interest, while his



left hand, would be rolling a dry maize-leaf round some black tobacco.

Dark columns of smoke appeared on the horizon and gradually turned into ships which came and settled all around us, flashing messages to the shore only to receive the same answer as we. Traffic up the mightiest river in the world was halted, because a mechanic on shore was having trouble finding the right spanner. Or, perhaps, the pilot was attending a christening?

We, who were not in such an extreme hurry, were able to smile as we watched this mute struggle between a man in a deck chair and a growing horde of representatives of the mighty world beyond Brazil where people think that time is money. And as none of us had shares in any of the shipping companies represented in the queue, we could not help being in a way glad that the omnipotent ones had for once received a rebuff and would not be able to avenge themselves afterwards.

However, it would have been useless to hope that this might have made any of those busy men begin to wonder whether their motto, "Time is Money," was any more correct than the South American version used in toasts at every one of the many festive occasions of which life consists: "I wish you health and money—and the time to enjoy both!"

The pilot arrived well on in the morning of the next day. He smiled to us as though nothing had happened.

"Please—West-by-North." Now life could begin again. Slowly the screws began to turn.

We moved on towards the mouth of the Rio Amazonas.

Even though a travelling journalist's life consists of a constantly moving chain of experiences and new impressions that flicker past like a restless film, and are

registered on the brain and the white page of a notebook one moment to be forgotten the next, there are episodes that etch themselves deep on one's mind and can never be erased by even the most exciting events of later life.

Such were the moments when I first came sailing into Rio, and when, many years ago, I first saw the skyline of New York emerging out of the morning mist. I felt the same when I first saw the steep storm-whipped mountain called Cape Horn; and the time when my field glasses showed me a mountain ridge rising out of the sea and I knew that that was Tahiti.

At all events, I have come to realize that it was not the visual impression alone that set these apart from all the thousands of other impressions. It was the consciousness of all that is connected with the places themselves.

Pictures, films, books and the tales of others have made these places grow in one's mind into milestones on the wandering ways about the world.

One's senses have been influenced by literature. Pierre Loti, Stevenson, O. Henry, Joseph Conrad, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, Negley Farson, Holger Rosenberg, those are but a few of the men who have brought the individual stones for the mosaic we ourselves form of places which we have not yet even managed to see; and each time we come to a new place, this picture we have already made rises up and insists on being compared with what we actually see. And so now it was with the Amazon, father of water, mother of the green hell, the mightiest river in the world, that now came flowing out to meet the ship.

I have now and again been disappointed by a town, a mountain, or a river, all because I had come expecting too





much. But here on the threshold of the Amazon it was the other way round.

I have been reading about this fantastic river ever since I was a child. I have read endless statistics about its length, breadth, how many cubic yards of water it carries along a second. I have also read and heard that you can trace things that have drifted down the Amazon several hundred miles out into the Atlantic, but I had never conceived that you could say exactly to a quarter of an inch where the sea stops and the river begins.

Wasn't it reasonable to assume that the sea- and river-water would have mingled after a bit?

I was standing on the fo'c'sle, feeling rather like a galleon's figurehead, with an uninterrupted field of vision ahead and to either side. Then I met the Amazon.

Was it we who were sailing towards it, or it that came pouring irresistibly out to meet us? It was impossible to say. But there ahead, was a low greyish-brown wall rushing forward across the clear ultramarine sea. Golden foam formed where the two colour-surfaces met, yet not along a straight line, but in grey-brown wedges, thrusting into the blue in long spikes and tongues. And wherever the brown water had won forward, the surface was swirling round in a maelstrom, churned into foam and thrown now here, now there, in erratic eddies. Yet the whole time the dividing line between the two colours was absolutely clear.

Even when the ship's sharp bows cut into the grey-brown water like a knife, when for a second I had the meeting of river and sea directly under me, even then the boundary between them was as though drawn with a ruler. There was something impressive, something majestic, something unnatural about their meeting, about



that fierce, silent struggle between the ocean and the world's mightiest river.

A dark, hazy coastline was just visible far away on the horizon on either side of the ship, and that battlefield stretched right from the one coast to the other. Those two colliding colour-surfaces and above them a sky that was grey and heavy with driving rain-clouds over the sombre river, and light and sunshine-blue above the sea astern. It was as though the world had suddenly divided into two, one part dark, the other light, and there in the middle were we—a moment since a large steamer in the gentle Atlantic swell, and now merely a black spot, a chance piece of flotsam among all the rest on the dark mouth that opened ahead of us.

The strip of blue astern grew narrower and narrower. The black clouds crept on towards the sun, bulged across it and expunged it from the sky. After that everything around us was grey-brown and dark. The distant horizon had disappeared behind thick curtains of driving rain.

There was a flash of searing, blue-white lightning and an instant later the cloud right overhead unloaded itself on the ship. The rain pelted down on the hot deck and a clap of thunder that drowned every other noise made us fall to our knees.

The Amazon was bidding us welcome.

I don't know whether it can have been "party-fever" that prevented me from getting to sleep during that evening and night we lay off Belem waiting for the tide to turn so that we could go alongside the quay, but I think it must have been that, for we had not had anything particularly heavy for supper. The steward had been in a bad mood.





The last time I saw him, when I went up on to the bridge, he was standing in the pantry door chewing a Dannemann cigar into a sour black mass. The sweat was running in small streams down his wrinkled forehead, and he was swearing softly as he wiped it away with a soaking shirt-sleeve. Those who went in for an evening cup of coffee were informed that not even if he were offered two thousand good American dollars a month would he take a job ashore in this God-forsaken corner of the world.

I stood up there on the bridge leaning out over the rail beside Captain Cudahy, just stood and watched twinkling lights and their dancing reflections in the swiftly flowing muddy water of the river. It was not that it looked any more exciting in there than any other of the accursed harbours up and down the world, where I have had to lie awaiting pilot or berth for nights on end—on the contrary. But that low coast was the sally-port for the Amazon River, the harbour used by 3700 miles of river, a river that stretched its tentacles to every side and scraped up everything from as far away as Bolivia in the south and Venezuela in the north.

Surely it was excusable to feel a little mazed and to be unable to sleep, when all the time as I lay in my bunk I was thinking: this really is the Amazon gurgling round the anchor-chain! Many times I had heard and read about that river and dreamed of sailing up it, and now it was about to happen.

The rain had stopped. It was a clear starry night and the moon was shining.

A fishing-boat without lights slipped slowly and noiselessly between us and the lights ashore.

A white cathedral made a lovely sight in the moonlight.

But really it could just as well have been South Shields, or Emden, or Aalborg, lying in there.

Morning came. The tide turned and we slipped into our berth. The hatches were uncovered. Foremen, still hoarse with sleep, began shouting, and winches commenced to whirr.

A grinning negro carried my luggage down the gangway. Cudahy shouted down from the boat-deck through cupped hands that we should meet at the "Grand" in the evening for a gin and tonic. I nodded back, but that was a thing I could not possibly decide on the spot, for, while to him Belem was just one of many ports to be got out of as quickly as possible, to me it was the narrow opening in that green wall into which so many have gone and from which so few have returned. How can you make arrangements about a gin and tonic when you are on the point of going ashore on the fringe of the forests where even such an experienced explorer as Major Fawcett disappeared?

The first thing to be done was to get my luggage through the customs. My assurances that I had not come from abroad but merely made the trip from Bahia to Belem on board an American ship did no good at all. I insisted that my film apparatus and cameras had long since been cleared into Brazil, but it was no use. The man behind the barrier was adamant that my luggage must be opened, and that could only be done in the presence of the controller, whom we would not be able to find till 11.30. It was then 8.15.

This being so, I said that I would leave my baggage and come back again at 11.30.



"There's no point in doing that," said the kind, smiling customs official, "because we close at eleven. It's Saturday."

I smiled nicely and we clapped each other on the shoulder.

Then I got hold of the shipping company's representative. He was furious, as only the day before he had told the customs people that a man would be coming off the *Cape Cumberland*, so that they should be ready to pass through my suitcase, film equipment and the swordfish-tooth I had bought in a weak moment somewhere down the coast and which was so large that it would not fit into my suitcase but had to be tied on to the outside with string. Since I bought it, it had already torn holes in two of my trousers, a hotel curtain and an elderly lady's skirt, but I just could not think of parting with it now.



The man who represented the shipping company seated me in his car and we drove to the offices of the customs, where the man we wanted was not to be found. He had gone down to the sheds they said, and smiled pleasantly.

He hadn't, of course. We found that out when we got there. Back at the customs building we found him in his office where he had been sitting the whole time. He sat there picking his teeth, with his feet up on the table—you see, so many Americans come to Belem.

He smiled very nicely and seemed quite glad to see us.

Would I be so kind as to fill up these three manifests, each in triplicate?

That done, we went back to the sheds. I handed over the manifests which contained a careful description of everything in my luggage, though I did perhaps forget the two cartons of "Players" and the three pounds of chocolate intended for Christmas presents. But then I

hadn't bought them in Brazil but had got them cheap on board the *Cape Cumberland*, so it wasn't really necessary to mention them.

And then I was allowed to go. No one even bothered to ask me to open my suitcase.

I took a taxi up to the Hotel Grande. They had a room for thirty shillings a day. That's what you pay in Rio de Janeiro. I unpacked and went down to the pavement restaurant outside the hotel and sat there watching the people on the street while I drank a glass of beer or something similar.

I had been told that if only I sat there long enough someone I knew would be bound to turn up in that teeming crowd. Belem is an airport with more traffic than most on the international routes. The planes on the New York-Rio-Buenos Aires run spend the night there, the passengers in the Hotel Grande. I sat and waited for three-quarters of an hour but not even the waiter appeared.



The mood I had been in all the long night as we lay in the roads outside the town began to pass, and I no longer thought so much about jaguars and Fawcett. There was something civilized and homely about Belem, that wasn't to be dispelled even by the sight of the elderly negro with the grey beard who went from table to table along the pavement trying to sell a boa-constrictor that twined affectionately about his neck and arms. It was five foot long and a fine specimen of the species.

Later he had the luck to sell it to an American explorer who had come to Amazonas to write books about how he caught snakes, but that is another story altogether which you shall hear about later. Anyway, he gave too much for it. Twenty-five shillings in English money. That's

five shillings a foot. But then of course he was an American. People in Belem have a sharp eye for Americans.

Before the war you could buy a hotel in Belem for little more than £100. During the six years of the war, when Belem was an American air base, the hotels all paid off their mortgages and their directors are busily engaged selling them at top prices to enterprising people who will go bankrupt over them in a year or two's time.

"A beer? Gladly!" said the waiter in American. "And perhaps you would like to know that that chap sitting over there drinking lemonade, the little fellow with the pimply face and red nose, he's the Secret Police which keeps an eye on foreigners. Nice to know, isn't it? He's the only one we have."



How to describe Belem, the town at the mouth of the Amazon? It is larger than you had expected, yet not so big as the map of it makes it appear. Judging by that it should be about the size of London. Belem has had a very far-sighted city engineer with an interest in town planning, and he has marked on the map all the streets, avenues and boulevards he could possibly conceive as ever being likely to be needed.

He must have made that plan during the great rubber boom of fifty years ago, in the days when Pavlova used to dance in the theatre opposite the Hotel Grande, when the conductor used to serve coffee in the tram as it went along, and a superb gas light dangled from its roof, like the ones you see on the faded photographs from 1890 in the Club Paris.

The theatre is still there and small companies play small pieces on its stage, now much the worse for wear. But it is no longer what it was in its heyday, when it was

built to outdo the opera in Manaus. The auditorium was decorated by the same artist who did the paintings in the Cathedral. But Angeli's expensive ceiling paintings are mouldy now and their cheerful colours faded. The plaster is falling off in places. Dusty female figures still hold dusty lustre-lights out over the broad staircase, but the red plush and plaited gold braid on the bannisters is threadbare now. Belem has had its great time, but not its greatest, or so the townspeople say.

A day will come when railways and roads have been driven through the jungle and malaria conquered by science. Perhaps it will be long in coming, but one day Belem will have out-stripped the other great river ports of the world, or so they say.

Till all that happens, it is nice to think that a foresighted engineer thought of that spacious town plan so long ago, just as it is nice to think that a generation ago the city had a governor who spent all the town's money on making parks and gardens, until they had a revolution and threw him out. But the parks are still there and every mango tree in the long lines of green treetops along the boulevards is overgrown with orchids that the Norwegian, Finn Knutson, was commissioned to fetch from the interior of the jungle.

The outer boulevards and avenidas shown on the plan do not, of course, exist at all as yet. Here and there on the periphery you will find a desolate strip of paving running through green grass beside a few lonely mud huts, but further out the jungle still grows unconcernedly over the places where one day skyscrapers are to be built.

A people that couldn't be broken by the rubber crash and the bursting bubble of speculation is not going to be put off merely because it has to wait a little.





To-day the trams don't have gas-lamps nor is coffee served in them. When you see and hear them rattling past the café outside the Hotel Grande you realize that they are equipped with square wheels. If you should chance on one that glides smoothly over the rails on round wheels, that is the city council's experimental car.

There is plenty of pressure in the water-pipes because the pipes have rusted internally till there is only a tiny passage left.

The paving is so full of holes and swellings that the cars prefer to drive along the tram lines. It's not good for the tyres, but much better for the kidneys.

But progress is being made, even though not so quickly as usual in Belem.

Uncle Sam paid 7s. 6d. a pound for para nuts for his Christmas, f.o.b. Belem. Ocelot skins went up from 12s. 6d. to £4 each in the course of the war. That's something worth having. There must have been a drop of champagne in the glasses in the Hotel Grande now and again.

And occasionally a little tear would drop into the Clicquot at the thought of how difficult it was to get motor-tyres.

Difficult to get rubber in Belem on the Amazon, where rubber trees grow wild, from which less than half a century ago rubber flowed out all over the world! Yes, for the world grew tired of the Brazilian tempo, got hold of some of the carefully guarded seed, planted rubber trees in nice straight lines away in Malaya and found yellow coolies to tap them for a handful of rice a day.

Ten years after that happened there was no one willing to make an offer for Brazil's natural rubber.

And how was it that they didn't keep going with the



quinine tree that grows on the slopes of the Andes, the only place where one could get the bark that protects against malaria? Even that trade disappeared.

When the last war broke out Japan had almost a monopoly for quinine in the world, while in Brazil people had even forgotten where the trees grew. They had to beg the U.S.A. to send them some tons of atebrein—atebrin, an artificial substitute for the quinine that Brazil had, but had lost.

Ah, yes—that modest glass of champagne! There are people who make a success of things. And there is the bitterness of the occasional thought that they live in a country which is so rich that the people can't be bothered to hold on to a good thing if it costs a little sweat.

But never mind. Things are all right as it is. The town has charm and it is relatively cool in the shade of the great mango trees on the terrace of the Hotel Grande. When it is Saturday evening and the orchestra in its white tropical uniform is playing in the bandstand of the Praça, and slender black-eyed women in light, colourful dresses saunter slowly past, then, indeed, you have no feeling of being on the outer fringe of civilization, on the very edge of the largest and most notorious jungle in the world.

And when the Panair coaches stop in front of the hotel and zealous piccoloes run about for dear life and dollars with pigskin luggage, as the passengers slowly stroll into the vestibule wearing the latest from New York or Paris, it is then you discover that you are at one of the cross-roads of the world's traffic. Never mind if they all go off the next morning to Rio, Buenos Aires, or Miami Beach, you have seen the film star write her name in the hotel register; and that steel magnate, he looked just like the



## THE AMAZON

rest of us as he sat there chatting with that world-famous tennis player in the lounge.

All the world passes here. If you wait long enough, they say, you will be able to meet all your acquaintances in front of the Hotel Grande, but I feel that that is a bit of an exaggeration, like the old saying that you can become King of Sweden if you wait long enough.

## CHAPTER II

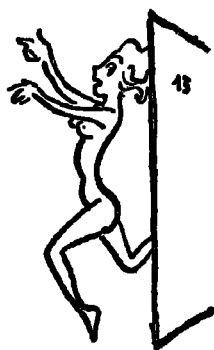
### *Neil Brink tells of his Adventure*

THE Hotel Grande has three floors of bedrooms. The elegant suites on the first floor are rented by Panair which keeps them for the use of its passengers. The second floor is inhabited by well-to-do couples, each in a nice double room. On the third floor live the local roving spirits and the lone travellers.

It is to the third floor that the people from the rubber plantations are relegated. There sleep men who say little, disappear into the jungles and virgin forests for months on end, and then re-appear just as mysterious as when they left. Some never come back and no one ever inquires about them. No one comes to claim the trunk they left behind.

Up here there are only single rooms. Occasionally, when the genteel floor below is full up, a novice will be sent up into our corridor. The other night we were woken up by a piercing shriek that sounded as though somebody was being killed. When we had managed to disentangle ourselves from our mosquito-nets we found a lovely young American girl in the corridor in hysterics and nothing else.

All that we could get out of her was that she had seen a crocodile on the floor as she was on the point of getting into bed. Now, there are crocodiles in Brazil, but none of us there had yet seen one on a third floor in Belem. On investigation it turned out to be a gekko which was



sitting in a corner of her room enjoying itself snapping up mosquitoes. It is quite true that a gekko does look like a crocodile, but it is only four or six inches long and a much sought-after animal for the house all over the country.

It was naturally some time before we returned to our beds. There was a Swede from Santarem who had a story of how he had gone into a bathroom in the best hotel in Manaus for his morning shower after a long and eventful night. It had been pitch dark in there, and before he had found the switch he heard a furious hissing and felt something slimy and cold glide across his bare toes. His bawls brought the porter, who assured him that there was nothing to be afraid of. What had happened was that a diamond merchant had bought himself a marsh-tortoise down by the river and had shut it into the bathroom so that it should have the damp it liked.

But when you're not yet properly awake even that must be a bit queer. As Neil Brink said: "It's all a question of adapting yourself." And that's what he has been doing ever since he was a kid.

I had better tell you a bit about Niels Brinck, for that is what he was christened before anyone thought that his post would be forwarded from a permanent address in Brooklyn to Porto Velho on the upper Madeira River.

"I went to Flemlose School," he said, and it was strange to hear him pronouncing that Danish name with an American accent in the Hotel Grande at the mouth of the Amazon.

"With the exception of Uncle Niels who was killed in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, all my family lived in the country. I was the stupidest but one in the school. That other later became a school-



teacher in Zealand. It's not necessary to mention names—I mean, if I don't, then every kid in Zealand will be able to enjoy thinking that perhaps his teacher is the one, won't he? •

"There's no need to go into details about my wanting to go to sea, and how I used to play truant and hang about the boats in Assen harbour till I was stuffed full with tales about foreign lands, and how in the end I was chucked out of school. That's all happened to so many others.

"I began in the autumn of 1920 with the *Anna Drost* of Faaborg. We only went across to Aabenraa, where there was a letter from my father waiting for the captain asking him to make me sick and tired of life at sea. The skipper himself showed me the letter. I stayed with him for seven months, by which time I was not sick of sea-life, but of his pork and sweet soup. So then I signed on as ordinary seaman with the top-gallant schooner *Urania*. The speciality there was cabbage soup.

"In Hull I absconded and went into steam. That was a softer job, and I have always preferred what is soft. She was the *Anna Maersk*.

"We sailed to Baltimore and took cargo for Pernambuco here in Brazil where I landed just at carnival time. In Mexico, for a bet, I once jumped down into the arena during a bull fight. The bull was so frightened that it cleared the wall in one almighty leap, which made the matador so furious that he started chasing me with his sword, and I had to follow the bull over the wall. That was the best turn they had ever had in the city.

"I was on Norwegian and Spanish steamers, and then one day I signed off from an English boat in Esbjerg to go home and do my military service.



"When that was over my father asked whether I wasn't yet tired of the sea. If so, he might consider giving me a ticket to Canada or the U.S.A., whichever I chose.

"I chose Canada.

"Over there I met a Dane who advised me to go out with him and fell trees. 'It's quite good exercise,' he said, 'But are you strong enough? Some of the trees weigh over fifty tons.'

"'But you don't have to carry those by yourself, do you?' I asked.

"'No,' said he. 'There's generally one at either end.'

"That was about the only thing that amused me about lumber-jacking.

"If I'm to be quite honest, that really wasn't anything but just work, and that's a thing that has never interested me unless there was a little fun attached to it. So I went back to sea as a stoker on the small passenger boats that cruise round the big lakes.

"I wanted to get to the U.S.A., but it was taking so long with papers and quotas and all that nonsense, that one night I built a raft and paddled across the river at the International Falls. The following day I was already employed as a carpenter on building a wooden bridge. I had never so much as fastened a pair of hasps on to my clogs, but in America you just say that you are a specialist in whatever sphere it is and take your wages as long as they will give them to you. Lots never get found out.

"I got six dollars a day and lasted a week. That gave me some capital to start with. To increase it I took a job as a farm-hand. That lasted till I tipped a load of hay through a barber's window.

"With seven dollars in my pocket I started on with a



young American on a trip to sunny California. We were kicked off the freight train at Bismarck, North Dakota, but we were able to rejoin it when we discovered that the guard was prepared to tell us when railway police were going to make a raid. That only cost us 50 cents and in addition we were given quarters in an extra luxurious freight car with straw on the floor.

"We got off voluntarily in Billings, Montana, because we wanted to play at tourists in the Yellowstone Park. My companion caught a grasshopper and I made a hook out of a safety-pin, and so we fished for trout in the Yellowstone River. We sold them to some millionaires who were standing beside us casting with split canes and flies.

"In that way we made 35 dollars in a couple of days and bought a tent. There was nobody expecting us anywhere. We sauntered our way right across America and ended up in Los Angeles. There my partner and I parted. He was red-headed and wanted to get on the films, but I have not yet seen him on the screen.

"One day when I was standing stupidly gaping at a building in progress, a Swedish foreman-mason crossed the street and asked if I were Swedish.

"'God forbid! Have I come to look like that?' I asked.

"'Can you lay bricks?'

"'Lay bricks! I'm the best bricklayer Denmark's ever had. I only emigrated because they couldn't pay me what I was worth.'

"'O.K.' said the Swede. 'You're the man we need.'

"For a fortnight I toiled bricks up scaffolding for eight dollars a day. Then I was given the chuck by the trade union ~~man~~, because I didn't have a card. That didn't





matter, for I went down to the harbour and got a job on an English passenger steamer called the *Caledonia* as Roumanian interpreter for the third-class passengers.

"I had never heard a word of Roumanian, but the job sounded very interesting and I wasn't worried because there was no one else on board who had the faintest idea of it, and besides, we had no Roumanian passengers until the third trip. One did come aboard then and so I got myself paid off in Liverpool.

"In 1925 I was in America, in New York. One cold winter's day I read in an advertisement about how lovely it was in Florida: palms and all that. So I set out to go there.

"It had gradually become dangerous to travel by train—that's to say the way I did it. If you were caught you were put in irons and made to work on the railway for a month or two. And not selling tickets or standing about holding a red flag or anything of that sort, but lugging heavy sleepers and rails about, or wielding a shovel from morning till night. So I decided to hitch hike.

"For the last lap of the journey I rode on top of a load of bananas on a lorry. I helped them unload in a small town in Florida and discovered that there was alcohol underneath. That was in the golden days of prohibition.

"I walked off down the highroad and when I grew tired lay down under a large hoarding to sleep. I was called in the morning by a policeman who wanted to put me in jug. As we walked along, we came to a hoarding. On it in large red letters, I read: 'Welcome to our town!'

"When I was let out I went down to the harbour, and there a man came up and asked me if I understood Diesel engines. If you can get away with three tri- as a

Roumanian interpreter, there is little harm in saying that Diesel motors are another of your specialities. After all I was a fellow countryman of Burmeister and Wain.

"It was all most suitable, for he was looking for an engineer for a tug that was stranded in Havana, because the entire crew had left her and gone ashore.

"When I reached Havana I found the captain sitting in the cabin drinking rum. We went down to the engine room and there he asked me if I had ever seen such a motor before. 'No,' said I straight out.

"I'm glad you said you hadn't,' said he. 'Now I know that you're no bluffer, but a proper engineer. This, you see, is an entirely new type built as an experiment. You won't find another like it.'

"During the next hour he showed me all its refinements, and by the end of the following night I was a Diesel expert. We sailed back to Miami with timber lighters in tow, mahogany and that sort of thing. When we arrived, I had done so well that I was given a rise from \$175 to \$250 a month. They realized that I was a specialist; while I realized that the less I touched that infernal machine the better. All I had to do was to let it look after itself and not to fiddle.

"I was half a year with that company, by which time I had saved so much money that I could go ashore and start becoming a millionaire by speculating with land. That was in the days when Miami and all that down there had only just been discovered. The town grew from hour to hour, and there was a lot a smart man could do there. In one year the population of Miami grew from forty to eight hundred thousand.

"I bought the deeds of a plot that was right by the sea and only three minutes from the centre of the town.



That was in a pub down in the harbour. I gave fifty dollars for it. When I got there I found that it was three minutes by telephone from the City Hall and that the plot was not then visible as it was high tide. I sat down and waited till it was low tide. It looked lovely then. A sparkling bathing beach. A passer-by offered me 1200 dollars for it on the spot, but I wouldn't go lower than 1500. It was being rumoured then that they were going to build a station somewhere nearby. I held on to my plot until it was not worth fifty cents. I have it still.

"I gave up speculation and became a civil engineer and helped to build the harbour. Luckily the great hurricane came and destroyed everything I had constructed. I don't think it would have passed expert inspection. The hurricane resulted in everything coming to a standstill in Florida for a while. There was no more work for me so I took to a little mild spirit-running. That, as you no doubt remember, was an entirely legitimate undertaking in those days. No shame attached to it whatever, and very few were ever jailed for it.

"I became engineer on a devilish speed-boat with three 1200 h.p. aero-engines. It could do 45 knots. We got the stuff from an old boat that lay anchored off a little island called Cattey, and we also made occasional trips to Porto Rico, Tortola, Cuba, and even as far down as Honduras.

"The end was abrupt. One of our people had been taking too many samples in the store and ran the boat at full speed up the bathing beach at Palm Beach, right among all the sun-bathers. The police came to ask what we wanted there and why there was such a lovely smell, and we thought it was time to abandon ship.



"The people on the beach were overjoyed when they discovered what was in the boat.

"That is still talked about to-day.

"I had earned five thousand dollars by my four months' work, and as I had learned a considerable amount about engines by then, it was with a clear conscience that I went to New York and took a job as engineer on a large yacht, the *Utuwanna*, which was to go with a crew of fifty-six on a scientific expedition to the West Indies. We were to investigate currents and that sort of thing.

"Our investigation took the form of loading up with a number of cases with bottles of spirits in Cuba; then we emptied a bottle, put in a little scrap of paper saying what a grand time we were having and would anyone who found it be so good as to send word to an address in New York, and threw the bottle overboard. It was a most entertaining form of scientific investigation.

"When it was over we were all given a bonus of a thousand dollars.

"The costs of the whole trip were borne by the great provision firm of Armour, so if you write anything about all this, put in a bit at the end about Armour's sausages being the best.

"I was now a bit older and more staid, so I went to the Technical Institute in Oakland and took a three years' engineer's course. During the holidays I worked with Western Enterprise, which builds Diesel engines. When I had taken my exam. I sailed with six halibut cutters to Alaska as guarantee-engineer, and I went with a tug boat to Honolulu, also for Western Enterprise.

"In 1931 I was all ready to set to, for I had an engineer's diploma that went for boats of any tonnage.

"I had ~~not~~ been so good at writing home as I should



have been, so father had not been able to follow all my career. One day I got a letter from him asking whether I wouldn't like to go home on the five-master *Copenhagen*, as deck-hand. If so, I had only to get myself down to Buenos Aires. He felt sure it could be arranged.

"Instead I went to New York.

"The *Copenhagen* never got back at all.

"In New York I ran into a Swede who was of fine old aristocratic stock. His name doesn't matter. We called him 'Hydraulic,' God knows why. He asked me if I would like a trip to South America as second engineer on an old American warship that had been sold to Colombia. He himself was to be the first engineer.

"The ship was a destroyer with four funnels. She was turbine-engined and had originally been called *Flying Fox* but had now been rechristened *Marechal Soucre*. She had a speed of 35 knots.

"Just before we were due to sail, 'Hydraulic' disappeared. He was apt to do that on these small escapades. And so I was promoted to first engineer. We dropped our moorings and sailed southwards.

"That time I had no idea that I was going to go to war on the Amazon. . . ."

Neil took a long pull at his glass and glanced at his watch.

"Bed now. I've an awful lot to do to-morrow, but if you have nothing better for the evening, you shall hear the rest.

"You see, it was only with our setting sail for South America that my life began to liven up a little."



### CHAPTER III

*Neil Brink continues his tale*

"I THINK," said Neil, "I ought to give you a little sketch of the political set-up in the north-west corner of South America in those days of 1932.

"Peru was rather aggressively inclined. Bolivia and Paraguay were on the point of coming to blows over the oil in the Gran Chaco. The frontiers between Ecuador, Peru, Brazil and Colombia were a bit indeterminate up there in the north with those huge jungle-forests and all their rivers. But don't think that those roadless jungles and uninhabited swamps could ever have been a source of trouble. It was not the land—that was of no importance—but the rivers which were the things that mattered.

"It had become a matter of vital importance for Colombia to have a back-door through which its southern provinces might have access to the outside world. To transport those provinces' products across the mountains to the Pacific coast or to the Carribean ports, was to all intents and purposes impossible. The River Amazon provided such a back-door. By agreement with Brazil, the Amazon was an international waterway, and Colombia was prepared to stake everything to obtain a permanent corridor giving her access to it.

"This was arranged by Peru giving Colombia the right to a bit of land that went as far as the Amazon at the point where it leaves Peru and flows into Brazil by a little town called Leticia. The papers were signed in



1922 and came into effect in 1930, but then Peru indulged in a revolution, drove out its tactful, peace-loving President, Leguia, and replaced him by Sanchez Cerro, a half-bred soldier who believed in power and in the weapons he imported from Japan on a large scale.

"Cerro was murdered in 1933, but before that he managed to stir up a fine row.

"One of the things he did was to re-annexe Leticia without asking Colombia, so Colombia was naturally very annoyed and immediately began buying up all the old warships there were in the market and sailing them down to the Amazon as fast as they could go. And that wasn't always so very fast.



"*Flying Fox* was all right; but the two small French craft that were part of the spoils France had got from Germany after the first World War, were not much use. One of them had to be *towed* right across the Atlantic. They were the former *Rügen* and *Helgoland* which were then renamed *Bogota* and *Cartagena*. They got another three from England, small diesel-engined gunboats that in their youth had done service on China's rivers.

"We were all to make for the same point—Belem, where we were to receive further instructions. War, of course, had not yet been declared. If it had, we should not have been able to use the Amazon.

"*Flying Fox* sailed southwards with the most motley crew that has ever been collected under one deck. There were eighteen different nationalities among the fifty of us. The skipper was a German called Richter. The first mate had been von Luckner's navigator on the *Seeteufel*, the pirate of the Pacific, then after the war he had gone to America and worked up a small business pressing trousers, but that had ceased to amuse him. The second



Small river boats drift slowly, with the current down the world's largest





mate was an Irish Colombian: he had never been to sea before, but he had been bodyguard to that famous gangster, Vannie Higgins. The steward was a Chinaman; the cooks had each a different nationality and conception of how food should be prepared; the stokers were Hindus, Arabs, and Puertoricans. Chief of the whole expedition, the man who was to command the assembled fleet, when it could be assembled, was General Vortez Vargas, a former police chief. He had been turned out of Colombia because he had been a little too quick to use machine-guns when dealing with strikers. Since then he had been living on Long Island as a writer for a good ten years, so he was really quite out of practice in waging war. All the same, when the call came from his country he stuck his fountain pen in his breast-pocket and girded on his sword again. Colombia had promised that he should be free to go home if he managed to win the war that was not yet declared.

"He was lame and we called him 'High- and Low-Tension.'

"It seemed that none of the generals in Colombia itself had any desire to go to those unknown parts where you ran a good risk of dying of fever before you could be shot.

"We sailed along the coast, putting into the various harbours, and in each some of our men absconded and we recruited new ones. We had lorry-drivers and window-dressers to whom we promised adventure unlimited and meteoric careers. Then we put into San Domingo, unannounced and with all flags flying.

"They had not received our telegram, and so when we fired a salute of twenty-one guns the people in the fort became a bit nervous, and thought that war must have



broken out." They replied with live shells but luckily did not hit us.

"As we drew alongside the quay the entire army came marching down to arrest us, but they gave up the idea when they saw how many we were. Instead, they decided to treat us as a friendly fleet on a courtesy visit and the Governor invited us to dinner and a ball. We had a good time. As we went home we took it into our heads to shoot all the street lights out with our pistols. The whole army came and surrounded us and put us in the lock-up, but we got one of the warders to ring up the Governor and he said that it was all right.

"After leaving San Domingo we almost went down in a cyclone, and when we put into Cayenne, to buy oil, two French gunboats came alongside and arrested the entire crew on the orders of the League of Nations. For three weeks we lived in the hotel and a French soldier with a rifle and fixed bayonet accompanied us every time we went to the inn. On several occasions we had to carry the man's rifle when we went back to the hotel in the evening. We had a pleasant time of it, but in the end, after long diplomatic negotiations, we were released. Because there had been no declaration of war we were merely out on a cruise.



"When at long last we did reach Belem, there was a Colombian troop-transport there with some infantry who were to take over the ships. Not having any fleet worth mentioning, Colombia hadn't enough marines for the job. A German gunner called Hans, a wireless operator, and I, remained with *Flying Fox*. I was given a Colombian uniform with cockades like an emperor's and enough gold on my shoulders to pay a smaller country's national debt.

"My new skipper was a young lieutenant, and with him in command we sailed up the Amazon to Tarapaca on the River Putomayo. We didn't intend to invade Peruvian territory as yet, for the enemy, with much shorter lines of communications than we, had already sent troops from Iquitos to the Brazilian frontier, and these were now churning up the waters of the Amazon in armoured motor-boats. We had first to find out how the land lay.

"Tarapaca is not a large town. As a rule none of the towns on those rivers are large. There were just four or five houses on the river-bank. We lay in such a position that we could shoot across the river should the Peruvians come past that way to get to the back of Leticia. There wasn't much to entertain us while we waited.

"The ship was built for a more northern climate and we soon had to move the kitchen range from the galley up on deck, where we installed it in front of the bridge behind the two largest guns which were housed on the fore-deck.

"And so we lay there waiting for five months, and all that happened was that I was promoted from Lieutenant-Commander to Commander. We heard about that from the consul in Belem, as the other ships from France and England began coming up to join us. In the end there were a couple of thousand of us gathered up there.

"We had also got a couple of Norwegian vessels. Once they had been called *Tonsberg I* and *Tonsberg II*, but now, of course, they had been given new and much finer-sounding Colombian names. The agent who had been responsible for buying and equipping them must have done very well out of his commission on the job. He



had placed so many guns on the deck that they couldn't so much as swing to the side.

"We were now, so to speak, ready to undertake something or other.

"We had one great advantage: the Indians were on our side. They told us the most hair-raising tales about the Peruvians who had made expeditions deep into Colombian, to say nothing of Ecuadorian, territory to get slaves for their rubber plantations. Those parts are a little outside the normal sphere of the news agencies, and you could do more or less what you liked there. Yet one short report did make its way back to Europe with the English rubber-buyer in Leticia who was summoned home to England and hanged by his neck until he was dead, because he had ill-treated the natives so gruesomely.

"However, there was no one to worry about what the Peruvians did, so they went round in their motor-boats catching Indians, until the tribes were so scared that they fled into the depths of the jungle the moment they heard the sound of a motor-boat.

"When they were unable to catch any more Peruvian Indians the expeditions began hunting in neighbouring countries. Naturally, the government in Lima knew nothing about that. Look at the map and you will understand that there is not much communication between the frontier districts of Peru and its capital, any more than there is in any of those Andes countries up in the north.

"The Indians they caught were sent out into the jungle to tap rubber. If, when they came back in the evening, they had not brought the required quantity, their hair was shorn off. If it happened again they lost their ears; a third time, their heads. The pillory and whip were punishments used for lesser disciplinary offences.

"You will understand why the Indians were so glad to see us when they heard that we had come to talk business with their slave-drivers. We caught one of them, a great, cruel brute of a man. We found him trembling under a layer of leaves in a hut. We shut him in and an hour later found him with cut arteries. And all we had done was to tell him that we would hand him over to the first Indian tribe we came across. He was our first prisoner of war. That was in Saravo. We buried him on the river bank.

"After that we became fairly active.

"At first we cruised round about in the rivers to make contact with the Peruvian ships and garrisons. Then we built ourselves a fort at a strategic point and put a garrison ashore. That is, we felled trees and made a foundation of logs on the mud, installed our guns and men on this, and sailed on. When we returned, the dry season was over and the river had risen. There wasn't a gun to be seen. They were all under water. But, then, we had plenty of guns.

"Our German gunner, Hans, was dying to be allowed to use our four four-inch guns on the fore-deck. He had served for four years during the first World War and had hit everything he aimed at, or so he said. One day he had his opportunity. We came round a bend in the river and saw a collection of huts. Dark shapes were moving about in the scrub and behind the trees round the huts. We had no people there.

"'Clear for action!' ordered the skipper. You should have seen Hans then. He served all four guns himself, leaping from one to the other. I had to laugh, for he was just like one of those musical clowns at the circus who play a sort of instrument made of long metal tubes.



The infantrymen were sweating with the effort of loading as fast as Hans shot, and we couldn't see either ourselves or the land for the smoke. The guns recoiled into the galley-range in front of the bridge and smashed it to smithereens. The deck was awash with coffee and half-boiled potatoes, but luckily no blood was shed.

"That should about do them," said Hans, and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"The smoke drifted away and we were able to observe results. Nothing had happened. The houses were still there. Only the creeping figures had come out from the scrub into the open. There was no danger there; they would never attack us. They were cows.



"It wasn't so much that which wounded Hans' professional pride, as the fact that not so much as a pane of glass had been damaged in any of the houses. He put this down to the guns being American ones, but on closer investigation we discovered that the fault did not lie there.

"The Colombian infantrymen were to blame. In their hurry they had picked up the wrong shells and had loaded the guns with ceremonial blanks.

"After that discovery Hans put proper shells in the guns and shot the houses to bits, so that there should be no mistake.

"That evening I went ashore to reconnoitre. There was a lovely moon. Suddenly I heard a rustle under a bush and leaped back, pulling out my revolver.

"It was only a little naked Indian boy. He had heard the commotion we had made away in the jungle and had crept up to see what on earth was going on. I took him on board as a prisoner-of-war and gave him some

chocolate. Neither of us understood a word the other said, but I did discover that he liked chocolate.

"He followed me through thick and thin for the next three years. It wasn't long before he had learned to speak English and he was most useful as an interpreter in our dealings with the Indians. He used to sleep outside my door, and I christened him Pedro. He was given a pair of shoes of which he was immensely proud. He wore them slung round his neck by their knotted laces. After the war I sent him up to Cartagena, where I got him placed in an N.C.O.'s school. He was very proud of the school's uniform but refused to wear the shoes. To make up for that he acquired a liking for brilliantine. With his first week's wages he bought a mirror and a large bottle of brilliantine, and when he had poured that all over himself he went out and bought an even larger one. After that he began looking round for a girl. He got drunk and ended up in the prison, where he stayed for two days till I bailed him out. After that our ways parted.



"When I came back to Bogota, ten years later, I was told that Pedro had been sent to a garrison somewhere near his own village. I would have liked to have been in the circle round the fire the first evening when Pedro related his experiences in the Great World.

"You must remember that there had been no declaration of war between Peru and Colombia," Neil went on, as he lit his twentieth cigarette from the stub of the nineteenth. "That would have involved us in all sorts of complications. The League of Nations would have meddled and there would have been no knowing where it would all have ended."



"But naturally, that did not rule out an occasional so-called episode.

"On one occasion *Flying Fox* was out on her own, as she usually was, for none of the other vessels had anything like her speed. We kept circumspectly to the small tributaries where larger ships could not go, for our intelligence service had told us that Peru had sent its largest warship, *Almirante Gran*, all the way round the north of South America through the Panama Canal and up the Amazon just to have a go at us.

Of course, we had also been receiving reinforcements. Our industrious agents had bought some German wooden speed-boats. They were fifty feet long and were brought to Belem by a German engineer on board a German steamer. When it arrived at Belem, the engineer fell suddenly sick. We did not discover what ailed him till we had examined the boats.

"The motors were new, the agent had said, but the boats themselves had been used. They would only go on petrol and special tropical petrol had been obtained. We scraped the paint off some of the tins and discovered another layer underneath with 'Admiral Byrd's South Pole Expedition' painted on it. The admiral had scrapped it because water had got into the tins and so it reached Colombia. But when we took down the motors, we found on the top of the carburettor the words 'Guaranteed till 1918.'



"There are plenty of people ready to cheat you when you are at war. But then, of course, we weren't.

"One day we were sailing unsuspectingly up one of the tributaries of the River Buenos Aires, which ran down to Leticia. It was far too narrow for our relatively large ship and there wasn't room to turn. If we had wanted

to go back, we should have had to back the whole way.

"Then suddenly we met a Peruvian gun-boat.

"We were compelled to fight and, of course, we didn't have a lot of room to manœuvre in. We elected to run up alongside the gun-boat at full speed, and before the Peruvians could count three, our infantry were swarming on top of them. They jumped down on her decks just as pirates used to do in the old days. The moment they found themselves face to face with their opponents, the Indians cast discipline and their rifles aside, and whipped out their long sharp jungle-machetes. Not a shot was fired. It was the most noiseless sea-fight that can ever have been fought.

"It was an hour and a half before we were finished. No one could be bothered to count the Peruvian dead, but we had forty killed and twenty wounded.

"General Vargas directed the entire operation from the bridge, sitting in a deckchair. He had his legs crossed and smoked a large black cigar. He appeared to find it a pleasant change from writing historical novels on Long Island.

"We took the gunboat in tow as a prize, and though our prisoners told us where we could find several more of the same kind, we had to go back to Tarapaca to replenish our numbers. Stronger and stronger forces had kept coming up the Amazon to our base there, and we can't have had far short of four thousand men.

"While *Flying Fox* was being re-equipped I lived on a steamer the Colombian Government had bought and anchored there as a hospital ship. The doctor told me that he had studied medicine in the U.S.A., but from what I saw of his methods I imagine his college must have been one of the large slaughter-houses in Chicago.



"He had a tame ape that sat on his shoulder at meals, and when he went shooting, or operated. When it had been naughty, it was put in the glass case where the bandages and medicines were kept. There it amused itself unwinding the gauze bandages. Then one day it had a drink out of the morphine bottle and died.

"There was only one coffin on that hospital ship. When a man died, he was laid in it and carried ashore. There they rattled through a prayer, rolled him out into the grave, and took the coffin back to the ship where it was always put alongside the man considered to have the best chance of needing it next.

"At that time I used to see a lot of the commander of a former Norwegian boat that had been rechristened *Baranquilla*. He was an Irishman and was called Sharkey. He had been in a fight with a couple of Peruvian gunboats, and his boat had caught it so badly that it had to be towed back to Tarapaca for repairs. He was a tough customer, but a bit of a fool.

"A year or two later I was on the Pacific coast of Colombia building a naval station. While I was there the papers welcomed *Admiral* Sharkey back to Colombia. There were fine pictures of him in full uniform, with a cluster of medals and a three-cornered hat. A very fine career that.

"Sharkey had come to Colombia before the little war that was never declared, because he had been chased out of Venezuela where there had been trouble about some oil wells. He was a man who always had to have something to get his teeth into, and he hadn't been in the country long before he had founded the first Boy Scouts Association. When the affair with Peru began to blow up, he volunteered as a wireless operator; but when I first

knew him he had long since given that up, just as I had abandoned the engine room to go in for strategy.

"The last I saw of Sharkey was a month or so after reading about his home-coming in the papers. It was only a glimpse I had of him, for he was tearing down a street in Baranquilla in his best uniform, gold-braided skirts flapping, white gloves clasped in one hand, and his three-cornered hat in the other, and his medals jingling like sleigh-bells. Behind him came a large fair-haired woman brandishing a thick stick above her head.



"I heard later that she was a German school teacher who had just learned what we others had long since known, that the Admiral was already married in three or four different countries.

"We caught a few more gunboats, and now and again something amusing would happen; but I shan't deny that we were beginning to get a little fed-up with the war.

"The trouble was with our rations. When we first came we had a good quantity of American tinned foods in the ship's bottom, but as the ship leaked all the labels soaked off and we never had any idea what we were going to have for lunch till the tins were opened. When we had eaten all our tins, we were left with nothing but rice and beans. And in the end there was only rice. Then we had to go out hunting and fishing. Ape meat is very tasty, and we also quite liked crocodile and electric eel.

"Of our four thousand men, fifteen hundred died a natural death. Some of them got beri-beri, but most fell victim to a disease that none of us knew. Their limbs swelled; the next day they had headaches and fever, and then they died. A Colombian specialist in tropical



diseases came to look into it, and died two days after he arrived.

"We bored an artesian well to give our people clean drinking-water, but none of them would touch it because it spurted up. Water, they said, should come down from above, otherwise there must be something wrong with it.

"Soon we had no one left to fight and the fleet found itself with nothing to do. There was, of course, still the *Almirante Gran*, but her we left strictly alone.

"Our land forces did not have such an easy time.

"Those that had come down from the north and had no communication with us, had a really hard time of it. The Peruvians were much closer to their bases, and our troops were forced back through the jungle towards Colombia.

"We had several German aeroplanes, and the Peruvians some French and Japanese machines, but there was a tacit understanding between the pilots that they would not shoot at each other. We, on the other hand, eagerly fired at every 'plane that appeared in our vicinity. We had been promised a bonus of a thousand dollars for every machine we brought down.

"One morning while it was still misty three hydroplanes came low across the river where we lay, intending to land. We were lying well camouflaged under a cliff covered with trees from the tops of which snakes and scorpions and ants dropped down on to the deck. Just as the first machine's floats struck the water some idiot or other began shooting at it with his rifle. When the pilot discovered that he was being fired at, he naturally pulled his stick back and took off again, followed by the other two. If they had only been given time to land

and stop their engines, I would have been three thousand dollars richer than I am to-day.

"The various women's organizations in Colombia made collections for us and sent us gift parcels. The German pilots were supposed to fetch them. Of course, it was easy enough for them to sell the food in the towns where they landed on the way down, but we did get the cigarettes which as a rule were so mouldy that no one would buy them. There were so many holes in the paper that it looked as though we were playing the piccolo when we smoked them, and then they exploded with a little bang whenever the red part got to another of the little worms that hid in the tobacco. They gave it rather a disgusting taste.



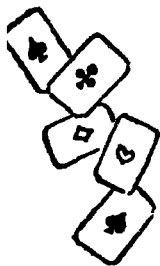
"We were beginning to get tired of playing at soldiers, when General Vargas suddenly got it into his head that we ought to help our hard-pressed comrades in the north by making an outflanking movement against the enemy's main base at Iquitos. By doing that we could cut his lines of communication with the south.

"I was appointed leader of that desperate expedition. 'Take Iquitos and not only will you be promoted and get a cash gratuity, but I'll see to it that your portrait appears on Colombia's stamps,' Vargas assured me before we marched off into the jungle.

"We didn't take Iquitos and my face has never appeared on Colombia's stamps.

"I marched off into the jungle with fifteen hundred men, but they were nearly all men from the highlands and quite lost in those huge thick forests and treacherous swamps. Our food was bad from the very start, and the expedition had to turn back because we were starving.

"The German pilots were to have brought us our pay;



but they never came. One machine took off and was lost in the jungle, so they informed us by telegraph. Then they sent the money again, but this time by boat up the Amazon, and it took a long time before it arrived. It was all the same to us, however, for there was nowhere for us to spend our five cents, except in playing cards, and for that we managed well enough with checks.

"Many years later, up in Long Island, I met the crew of one of the catapult-machines the Germans used on the *Bremen* and *Europa*. The pilot and I got talking, and we discovered that we had both served in Colombia at the same time. Then it transpired that it was he who had piloted the machine that had had our money on board.

"I just put the machine down in the forest and went home on foot to Bogota,' said he with a grin. 'I felt pretty sure that they would send the money again when they heard of the tragic fate that I had met. No one ever found out about it. But I had a grand time with your pay!'

"Then the League of Nations decided that the affair had lasted long enough. It sent an international commission by air to Manaus and from there up the Amazon to us. There was a Norwegian and a Greek, and two or three others. Another commission came from Peru and so they arranged matters and resolved the conflict.

"It was only an unimportant little affair and you won't read about the war on the Amazon in any school history book, but all the same it lasted for three years and, as you have seen, one or two things did happen.

"We were sent home. When I reached Manaus I had a surprise. A young girl whom I had got to know before I left New York had grown tired of waiting for me, as

## THE AMAZON

I was of waiting for the peace that would follow on the war that had never been declared. We had been corresponding and now she had come down there without my knowing anything about it. She had read in the papers that Colombia had bought a troop transport in New York which was to be sent down to bring our troops from the arena up the Amazon back to Bogota. Somehow or other she had managed to come with her, and there she was.

"She wanted to get married.

"I had no quarrel with that, but the authorities had. They had a horror of white slave traffic and that sort of thing, and wanted witnesses to prove that we had known each other for five years. It cost me a crate of beer to get two of the men working in the dockyard to sign the declaration; but after that there were no further obstacles, and we were married in the cathedral at Manaos.

"The gold had peeled off my fine uniform here and there so I hired a dress suit for the occasion. There was a big reception and breakfast at the hotel afterwards. Some English friends, one of whom had acted as my best man, tugging my tails when I was to say 'yes' and nudging me in the back when I had to say 'no,' sat and stared at me the whole time.

" 'Why are you so fidgetty and nervous?' they asked. 'It's all over now.'

"My wife was also looking rather strangely at me.

"Then I exploded and told them that the dress coat we had hired was swarming with fleas.

"Our honeymoon trip was to Bogota via Belem. My wife was the only woman among two thousand men. When we reached Bogota I was summoned to the Ministry of War and given the job of building a new naval





station at Cartagena. I built it, and afterwards a smaller one on the Magdalena River.



"It was just before Christmas, 1935, that we landed in New York. I was in white tropical clothes and a straw hat—without any gold braid—and there was deep snow in the streets. They stared a little in the shops when I went in to buy clothes.

"I never dreamed that I should ever go back to the Amazon.

"For a rest after all my adventures, my wife and I made a trip to Europe. We spent three months in Denmark and then went on over Danzig to Kowno, where Josephine came from. Then we went back through Sweden to the house we had bought in Brooklyn.

"After that I became first engineer on the old Swedish *Abraham Rydberg* that had become a millionaire's yacht and been renamed *The Seven Seas*. We went to the Bahamas and many other places. When I got back home I started my own engineering firm, 'Nordic Engineering Company,' and specialized in the installation of diesel engines in ships. I had thirty men in my workshop and representatives all over the country, but I sold the business during the war when materials became scarce.

"Before the war came, America started building fortifications here and there outside the country's boundaries. I was sent to Trinidad where I worked under General Ogden, went on from there to Curacao and British Guiana. I built a bauxite plant on the Mongo River in Dutch Guiana, and was later directed by the U.S. Army to Africa where I was loaned to the English under lend-lease. I was in Johannesburg and Durban; then I was sent by air to Cairo and we touched down in Uganda

on the way. Then the pilot offered an old negro a trip on the wing, but he wasn't having any.

"Are you afraid, great warrior, mighty hunter of lions? You will not die till your time comes," we assured him, but he wouldn't change his mind. "Supposing the pilot's time happens to come while we are up?" he said.

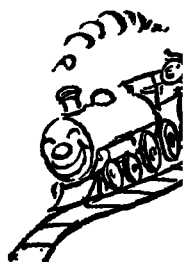
"From Cairo I was sent to Eritrea, where the campaign against the Italians had just ended. There was a power station to be built in Gura.

"There were a lot of hyaenas in the hills there, and they were all fat.

"I set up a cement works in Massawa and returned to Cairo, where they drove me out into the desert to repair the Alexandria-Tobruk railway that had been smashed during the fighting that was still surging backwards and forwards along that stretch of coast. It looked as though we might have to start all over again any moment, as the battle was coming our way again. Finally the English retreated and all Egypt was threatened. A Greek restaurant keeper in Alexandria refused to accept American money. He would only change German money, he said. The Germans had got that far with their troops and propaganda. One month later I came back again, had a thundering good meal in the same restaurant, and when I had finished, I threw a handful of German marks on the table and walked out. They were marks from the last German inflation and no longer valid. That was when Montgomery had started, and the situation was rather different.

"Then I was in Suez assembling American locomotives sent out from home in parts, and teaching English engine drivers how to drive them.

"In 1943 the Americans landed in Africa and my days





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of working for the English were over. I flew across the Red Sea to Aden and from there to America for orders.

"When I heard that they wanted to send me to Greenland to work on the bases there, I couldn't help grinning. You see, that was the second time there had been talk of Greenland.

"The first time was just after the Germans had invaded Denmark, when Greenland lay up there in the Arctic Seas with no one to look after her. I had run one day into a son of one of the big Danish shipowners whose ships were scattered all over the world without anyone knowing very much about where they were or in what direction they had sailed when the catastrophe happened. With us was an American, a millionaire, adventurer and speculator of the first water. Perhaps you will know him if I tell you that it was he who offered to buy the entire production of the Mexican oil-wells, when the U.S.A. and the Mexican Government were having words about the oil rights. His offer was accepted and he sold the oil to Japan, U.S.A. and Russia just as quickly as his tankers could sail backwards and forwards. He was on the look-out for something of the same kind now.

"Denmark had been taken but they had forgotten about Greenland. Mightn't it be a good idea for the three of us to form a company and go there and make the place a home for all the homeless, masterless Norwegian and Danish ships that were steaming about the seas?

"He had no idea where Greenland was and he didn't care a damn about the ships. What he was after was the concession for cryolite, and besides, he knew an oil company that was interested in the possibility of oil being found up there under the inland ice. The cryolite concession and the oil, if there was any, would bring in so

much money that they would pay all the expenses of running the colony.

"We had it all cut and dried in no time, and also a large steamer to take us and the men we would need up there. The millionaire had even engaged five hundred men.

"In a week or two all the arrangements were made for us to be able to land in Greenland and start the Republic of Greenland, of which I was to be the president. We had a design made for a flag. This was very important, for the shipowner's son intended to make it possible for American ships to be registered in the new republic and sail the seas under a neutral flag and so avoid all the restrictions and taxes that Uncle Sam finds necessary to inflict on those that sail under the Stars and Stripes.

"However, the day before we had decided to start out the newspapers reported that Canadian troops had landed on Greenland and occupied it for the Allies. If they had only waited a week, I would have been the ex-president of Greenland; that is, if they had dared to occupy it when we three were there with the five hundred men we had engaged.

"It wasn't because of that that I didn't want to go to Greenland now; but because I had spent so many years in the tropics that my blood had grown thin, and I had a wholesome respect for the cold. I explained that to them in New York, and that was how I came to the State Department's department for 'Co-ordination of American Affairs.'

"That was a great affair. It was they who sent me back to Amazonas and I have been working for them ever since 1943. The Department for the Co-ordination of American Affairs was set up when the U.S.A. was cut off



from its supplies of raw materials up and down the world, and especially in the East.

"The U.S.A. had only a limited stock of rubber, all of which had come from the Malay States, so we had to look for our rubber in the south. But Brazil's rubber production was appallingly neglected. After the catastrophic collapse at the beginning of the century they had hardly bothered to touch the rubber trees. Ford, of course, had started a plantation on the Tapajoz River, but the trees were hardly yet old enough to be tapped, and besides the yield would not have covered even half what was needed for the war. If anything were to be done, we would have to go back to the old Brazilian method of sending men out into the jungle with a bucket to tap the big wild rubber trees that are scattered all over the Amazon basin, but often with miles in between each.



"There was no organization to build upon. The whole thing had to be started anew on the ruins of what had once been. There was no limit to the money available for the job, and everybody they could find with any knowledge of the subject was sent south.

"The Rubber Development Corporation was started.

"It was fearfully difficult to get enough native labour to send out hunting for rubber in the forests. Amazonas still had a frightening reputation from the first rubber epoch, and it was not unjustified. Fever was the curse. Out of whole shiploads of men sent down river from the coast, only a few fever-riddled skeletons would come back.

"The U.S.A. went straight to the root of the trouble. Health conditions were to be improved and it couldn't be done too quickly. No one outside the Amazon basin

properly understood what a gigantic piece of work was accomplished in a fantastically short time. Never talk to me of adventure in the jungle, if you mean the various expeditions, stories about Indians, and all the rest of it. All that nonsense is just nothing compared with what S.E.S.P. accomplished in the jungle.

"If anything was to be done, the health of the workers would have to be improved. There would have to be no more of those small huts of bamboo and palm-leaves they used to build for themselves in the swamps beside the river banks, where mosquitoes attacked them in swarms and where their own excrement floated about round the huts unable to get away.



"In such a place a couple of dysentery amoeba and a few typhus bacilli could do wonders in conjunction with the myriads of flies that flourish in the swamps. Most of the rubber collectors had tuberculosis as well, and, of course, venereal disease.

"Proper houses were now to be built for them in the hills above the river, and these were to have an effective sanitary system with filter-beds and septic tanks, though, perhaps, we would have to make do with slaked lime to begin with.

"Two hundred and seventy-five hospitals with modern equipment were to be built so deep in the jungle that it took three days' flying to get there.

"Do you realize what the distances are like there? Looking at a map won't give you a proper idea, for you must take account of the windings of the rivers and the impenetrable jungle between them. There wasn't a road anywhere there. The jungle-forest reigned supreme.

"Every bit of material for the hospitals and houses was fetched from the U.S.A.: every sack of cement,



every iron girder and every brick. Some of the stations were two months by river boat away from the main base at Belem.

"On 14th March, 1942, an agreement for the co-operation of the American and Brazilian Governments was made. According to this Uncle Sam was to pay 100 per cent. of the costs in the first year, 75 per cent. in the second year, 50 per cent. in the third year, and 25 per cent. in the fourth year. For the rest the Brazilian Government was to put its hand into its own pocket. In other words, America calculated that the war would last till 1946.



"An army of doctors, nurses, architects and engineers was put on to the job along with 3000 workers.

"Amazonas was divided into thirty districts, and I am head of a department in Acre district in the out-of-the-way parts down by the Bolivian frontier, west of the River Madeira, a bit of the world that almost no one knows. I came down here to build 20,000 w.c.'s with the necessary water and drainage systems for the use of the natives. When I got to the place after forty days' sailing from Belem, there was so much sickness among the other engineers that I also had to set about building hospitals and draining the swamps.

"My most important area now is the district round the Madeira-Marmore railway, and I live in Porto Velho. We are not only building hospitals, but also teaching the mothers how to look after their children and seeing that they learn how to prepare their food properly. We are giving them atebryn both as a preventative and a cure for malaria, and most have to have the pills in hospital, for if we gave them a box they would throw it away. We have ourselves to see that they swallow them, for other-

wise they just hold them in their cheek and spit them out the moment they leave the hospital. Our nurses have opened schools and are teaching young native women and men the elements of nursing and hygiene, so that one day they will be able to take over the work and look after their countrymen themselves.

"Twenty-five river steamers have been sailed down from the U.S.A. and put into use as floating hospitals. They cruise round about that mighty network of rivers the whole time.

"Wherever the rubber collectors go they are followed by a staff of competent doctors who have to endure the same climate and run the same risk of disease as they. But it's not enough to go with them when they go into the jungle to work. We have built hospitals on the coast as well, in the rainless districts from which most of the rubber collectors are recruited. There the healthy ones are given preventative injections and classes before they set out for Amazonas, and there we look after them when they come home full of malaria and other tropical diseases.

"During 1945 S.E.S.P. gave 195,000 treatments without receiving a penny for it.

The Rockefeller Institute did a lot of work in these parts before the war, fighting yellow fever which lurks along the smaller rivers, and the dangerous Gambia mosquito that has suddenly appeared in South America having presumably been brought by aeroplanes coming from the Gold Coast. Now, S.E.S.P. has taken over the whole Rockefeller organization with its laboratories, and expanded it in every direction.

"And, oh boy, what a fight it is! A few thousand pale-faces against the entire mighty jungle and all its



sneaking insects, both those you can see and those you can't. I have been in a lot of things in my life, but never before on anything as gigantic as this. This is war, but a war where we're not trying to kill people by the thousand, but to save them from certain death.

"If only those scientists would give some more of their attention to us instead of racking their brains how to make an atom bomb still more devilish. We have need of them all, and there is just as much risk for the individual scientist in our experiments as there is when he plays about with his secret weapons. Where weapons are concerned, there is nothing more brutal and ruthless than the jungle.

"But, of course, we don't get into the papers so much, and never with such large headlines. We only get an occasional notice when some senator or other from Wyoming has criticized the expenditure of all the money we are 'throwing away to no purpose.'

"I'm not going to tell you that we won the war in Europe and the East; but we did at least keep a few army vehicles on the road and were responsible for the bombers having tyres to land on when they came back. You see, from 1942 to 1946 we *doubled* Brazil's production of rubber—thanks to our doctors and nurses.

"All the same, that's not much in comparison with what we are aiming to achieve in the distant future: to turn one of the world's most notorious plague-spots into a healthy place where the white man can live. Neither this nor the next generation will see that come about, but if Brazil herself can keep up steam when S.E.S.P. comes to an end, and can continue at the same speed as we have begun, then there is no doubt at all that one day that will be achieved.



"Of course, if the other scientists have meanwhile been lucky enough to produce the perfect atom bomb, there won't be much use in our having spent all these years here, nor in so many fine young doctors having staked their lives to carry out our plan."

Neil stood up, walked across to the window, and looked out across the huge broad river twinkling in the moonlight away towards the western horizon.

Neil Brink is only a little man, but he is the greatest unknown little man I have ever met.

"If there's anything else you want to know about the Amazon," said Neil, coming back from the window and taking a cigarette from the box, "come down to the restaurant. There are two young fellows I'm sure you would like to meet. They have just come down from the States, and what I don't know about Amazonas, they have off pat."



## CHAPTER IV

### *The Amazon in Dreams*



MR. AND MRS. HONEYCOMB had to alter their plans when they came to Belem.

It is certainly irritating to have to change your plans, but in this case it was Mr. and Mrs. Honeycomb's fault and not Belem's. It all came about because Mr. Honeycomb had been reading out-of-date books.

The Honeycombs!

You don't know them, but that is your fault.

They had been sent out by a big publishing concern in the States to make a hair-raising trip up the Amazon with the object of discovering its source—neither more nor less. And their intention was to get hold of some canoes and a bevy of Indians to paddle them up river to meet the adventures that lay in store for them.

Deep into the Green Hell. That's where they were going.

Manaos was to be their first stage. From there they would force their way up river right up to Iquitos.

So far, however, the expedition had been a great, great disappointment. They had thought that snakes crawled about the streets of Belem. They don't. And that was a *great* disappointment to Mr. Honeycomb, for he had a contract with a zoological garden "back home," which had promised to buy all the snakes he could get hold of—and it was so nice and easy to ship things back to the States from Belem.

He had a special grip for catching rattle-snakes, and Mr. Honeycomb demonstrated it on a walking stick laid across the table at which we sat in the Hotel Grande. He had been taught it by an old big game hunter at home in the States.

No, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Honeycomb had ever been outside the U.S.A. before.

He had worked in an office and she had taught gymnastics, but there was nothing exciting about that, and so they had gone to a big magazine publisher and explained their plans. The publisher had liked the idea from the word go, and had given them *carte blanche* as far as their equipment was concerned. They had found others equally accommodating. For example: toothpaste. They could have as much as they could use. They could brush their teeth night and morning and use more than the prescribed half inch, if only they would sign an advertisement with a half-page colour reproduction of them brushing their teeth in the heart of the jungle surrounded by stealthy Indians with blow pipes. To be on the safe side, the photograph was taken in a studio in New York before they left. A studio jungle is much more decorative than Nature's own product, just as Bally-hoo toothpaste is much superior to pulverized chalk.

Mr. Honeycomb was a tiny slender little man with the loveliest, trusting eyes and a smart little moustache. Mrs. Honeycomb was a head taller and a good deal stronger than he. Gymnastics develops the arm muscles. Her nose was like a hawk's beak in her smiling face. Mrs. Honeycomb had character.

"Why did you take your wife with you on the trip?" I asked Mr. Honeycomb, as we sat over a Coca-cola in the pavement restaurant.



"To appeal to the chivalrous instincts of the Indians. And then, you know, if a white man goes among the savage tribes by himself, the Indians might easily think that he was after their wives and daughters. When they see that I have my own wife with me they will know that they need not worry about that."

"Yes, but supposing the savage Indians should take it into their heads that they would like to inspect *your* wife a little closer?" As I said that Mrs. Honeycomb arrived. We never continued the conversation.



I was permitted to view the expedition's equipment. That is to say, what they were able to have in their room. The heavier stuff was lying in a warehouse in the port. There was one thing in particular that made my mouth water: a specially made hammock *cum* mosquito-net that had a zip-fastener and pockets, pockets—including one for a revolver—in every conceivable place. In all the Amazon district, big as it is, the like of it has never been seen. All that it lacked was electric light and an automatic punkah. I was convinced that the Chavantes Indians would be so astounded when they saw it, that they wouldn't have time to look at Mrs. Honeycomb.

The Honeycombs were to visit the Chavantes Indians after they had discovered the source of the Amazon. Mr. Honeycomb told me that they had never yet seen a white man. Now that's not quite correct. Nor was he altogether right about the source of the Amazon.

The Chavantes Indians have seen many white men and to date killed every one of them. When aeroplanes were sent to photograph them from the air, they came back with their wings full of holes made by arrows.

And as for the source of the Amazon, you will find it on any map, north of Lake Titicaca in Peru. For that

first stretch the river is called Marañon, so perhaps that is what misled the Honeycombs when they were making their plans for their sensational exploration. Or perhaps it was just due to their having read out-of-date books.

And then the idea of getting hold of some Indians to paddle them up river in canoes made of hollowed out tree-trunks, until after many adventures they would reach Manaus deep in the heart of the jungle! It sounded mighty exciting, but Honeycomb and I agreed that since it was going to be very difficult to get any real naked—or, out of consideration for Mrs. Honeycomb—half-naked Indians anywhere within seventy miles of Belem, and as it took many months to hollow a canoe out of a trunk, it would perhaps be just as comfortable and quick to take the river steamer.



As they would be paddling up stream and sure to encounter all sorts of adventures, to go by canoe would take up comparatively too much time. With one of the fast oil-burning river steamers they could be there in eight days. Or of course they could take the 'plane and fly there in eight hours.

The only snag about going by air was that it would be difficult to get them to take excess baggage to the number of tons that the Honeycombs had. Firearms of any type weigh a lot, and the Honeycombs had everything from elephant rifles to saloon pistols and revolvers, and enough ammunition for them to meet all eventualities. Type-writers, cameras and photographic equipment also weigh heavy.

"That's a Wonderbaby Portable," said Mr. Honeycomb, "and the cameras are Epaflex 1:2, Summar."

I could see in my mind's eye the back page of *Life* or *Fortune* with a smiling Mr. Honeycomb bent over the



typewriter while a boa constrictor dangled above his head.

"Is Epaflex a good camera for the tropics," I asked, for I was really interested.

"Epaflex is the best camera in the world," replied Honeycomb looking at me with his smiling blue eyes that guaranteed his inability to tell even the least little white lie.



"Of course, I have never used a camera before, but they told me at the factory that even a child could take photographs with it. This is the shutter. All you have to do is to press it down and the picture's taken. I am to take colour pictures for the paper. Only colour pictures. You know, à la Ivan Dmitre. I've already seen a good many subjects with mighty fine colours, and I've masses of colour films in our luggage. When I've used them, the paper will send me all I want by air mail.

"They also told me that if I was in a hurry I could charter a private 'plane. It's grand having a paper behind you."

"Have you read Evelyn Waugh's *Good Stuff*?" I asked.

"I've read such a lot on Amazonas," he said, "but I can't remember coming across a book of that name. Why did you ask?"

"No special reason," I replied, and you, if you haven't read it either, won't get any more explanation than that. You must go and buy it. It's all about Honeycomb.

It will be a hard blow for him when he reaches Manaus and finds that that welcome jungle oasis on his route to the source of the Amazon is a flourishing town of 107,000 inhabitants who ride in trams, drive cars, see American films in many cinemas, and go to the opera occasionally, when their wives absolutely insist. It ought to have been a row of straw-roofed huts with a lonely man sitting

on the rickety veranda of a tumble-down bungalow, a man who stood up with the glint of fever in his eyes and came down to welcome them at the river's edge with arms outstretched and a bottle of whisky in either hand.

Had it been like that, there would have been the germs of tragedy in the fact that the Honeycombs never drank anything stronger than Coca-cola.

A further piece of malice on the part of Fate was the fact that the steamers now go on from Manaus as far as Iquitos, and that the Booth Line have a representative there, and that you can go on even further in the comfort of a motor-boat till you get to the Falls.

How could you fit a tree trunk canoe into a description of that? And they would have looked so decorative in a coloured photograph!

However, Honeycomb's faith in adventure continued to shine in his gentle blue eyes.

And his beard grew from day to day, a reddish-yellow Clark Gable beard that was already three weeks old.

That beard turned Honeycomb into a man.

He decided to take a trip to Marajo while waiting for the result of the negotiations he had started through the American Consul with the local office of the Society for the Protection of the Indians.

"I'll get to the Chavantes Indians all right," he said, looking up at his wife with the smile that every film actor uses to express iron will and indomitable courage.

So, they went to Marajo.

Marajo is the large island that lies in the middle of the mouth of the Amazon. Luis Guimaras took them across in his motor-boat. On their arrival they were met by Antonio Vicoso who has a huge cattle ranch there. His family has been bound up with Marajo for centuries. He



had promised to look after them, for he is a great admirer of the U.S.A.

They came back considerably encouraged. They were no longer in the least disconcerted by the fact that river steamers went to Manaos three times a week, or by the knowledge that the source of the Amazon had been discovered. They had now experienced adventure.

Mrs. Honeycomb had been out riding. Not only that, but she had had to live on strange foreign dishes that were quite different from the tomato juice, apple pie, and roast beef they got in the Hotel Grande. They had been served with dried prawns! They had tried to eat black beans with some indefinable meat among them. Mr. Honeycomb was quite sure it had been crocodile. Then they had been given a drink that made their throats feel as though they were on fire. Their host had assured them that it was a teetotal drink, but all the same it had made them feel quite silly in the head.

And then, as I have said, they had ridden for days on end. Through unexplored parts that swarmed with crocodiles. Mr. Honeycomb had personally shot twelve with his new rifle. And then they had seen a poisonous snake. One of the very worst kinds. It had been thirty-nine feet long he said. Seventy-five, she maintained.

A horse had kicked Mr. Honeycomb off; he had sunk up to the neck in the mud and only been rescued at the last second by a gaucho who came hurrying up and pulled him out. After that he had been attacked by wild buffaloes. It had been a frightful experience, but the same gaucho who had already saved his life once, had done so again.

Unluckily during the week they had been away, Mr. Honeycomb had contracted both malaria and amoeboid





In Belém they have a curious taste in pets



The Puanhya's expression is not friendly



dysentery, despite all his care in taking the various pills he had brought with him, and always drinking boiled water to which he added chlorine tablets. However, some friendly natives had hastened to his assistance. They had given him a tea brewed from herbs they alone knew of, and the next day he had had no symptoms of malaria or dysentery.

The three American soldiers sitting at the next table were already sweating as they listened to his account of the trip.

Mrs. Honeycomb admitted that the taste of dried prawns was revolting.

The waiter hurried to and fro with more and more bottles of Coca-cola.

I was not being sarcastic when I said that in Honeycomb's eyes you could see that he was incapable of telling even a small lie. He is no relation of Münchhausen's, only a ten-year old boy of thirty-five who all his life has carefully tended a sacred flame kindled at the torch of the fairy-tales of all those who in the guise of explorers have filled the pages of the cheap weeklies with fantastic descriptions of distant lands—the more distant, the more fantastic.

Thus Honeycomb now sees the world through glass of their colour, and when he mounts a hobby-horse, it is to him a mettlesome, snorting charger. The *feijoadá* they gave him in Marajo was made of pig's ears and salted pork, but it was transformed in his mouth into real crocodile meat. And when riding across the huge area of the fazenda, he really did come across and shoot crocodiles, for they swarm in the large lakes in the centre of the island, and a favourite way of entertaining the

fazenda's guests is to take them out to the low-lying swamps.

Seen through Honeycomb's magic glass everything becomes either wonderful or fearful.

The stomach trouble and slight fever he got from eating over-spiced feijoada is usually known as "Belem tummy," but all the same Honeycomb really did suffer and struggle with the scourge of malaria and the terrors of dysentery, just as the camomile tea they gave him in the evening was to him made according to the medicine man's age-old recipe of herbs gathered deep within the jungle by moonlight, in places of which only two people knew.



And that is why he was cured of both mortal illnesses in one night.

Mr. and Mrs. Honeycomb were having the one great experience of their lives, and there is no doubt but that their paper will get enough sensation and excitement to give it full value for its money. It is also highly probable that Honeycomb will be lucky and take some colour photographs that will send Minnesota into ecstasies. People there are not yet blasé about orchids and brown-skinned natives.

The Society for the Protection of the Indians took charge of the Honeycombs. It did so reluctantly and only under pressure from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which itself had been badgered by the U.S.A. I know the society and its views on journalists who are not scientists and merely want to have a look at the Indians out of curiosity and a thirst for sensation. From it I received the coldest shoulder that I have ever had anywhere. In my letter of introduction to the local offices up and down the country I was succinctly described as a reporter, the

most contemptuous word an outsider can use of a writer; and the offices were asked to do all for me that was usual in such cases. When I got back to Rio de Janeiro I was quite aware of what was usual in cases like mine, and I tore my letter through and through.

The Society for the Protection of the Indians is pretty bitter about journalists if they write in a language that ordinary people can understand. Bitter experience has taught them that. However, the U.S.A. is a large country and there were many millions of readers behind Mr. and Mrs. Honeycomb's paper.

A man from the society came to the hotel inquiring for the Honeycombs. He was a big, tall, broad-shouldered chap with a skin like leather. He had been told that he was to take the Honeycombs with him in the Government 'plane up to the Tapajoz and show them some Indians.



"We'll get to the Chavantes district now," whispered Mr. Honeycomb to me that evening. "I'm sure the chap we're going with has shot countless Indians."

I refrained from telling him that the Alto-Tapajoz Company has rubber plantations away up near the river's source, and that it is one of the fundamental rules of the society that no Indian may be killed even in self-defence. No, I said nothing of that to him as he sat in his trousers on the edge of his bed beneath the mosquito-net with the revolver pocket, cleaning his brand new elephant rifle. You see, I've a ten-year old boy of my own at home and I know nothing more certain to catch at your heart than the expression in his eyes when some idiotic grown-up tells him that his paper kite flying over the lawn isn't in the least like a Skymaster on its way across the Atlantic in a frightful storm.



All the same, if I'm to be quite honest, I don't believe that Mr. Honeycomb ever presented his wife to the mighty chief of the Chavantes Indians!

Addendum—six months later.

I am long since back from my Amazon trip, and so are the Honeycombs. I have seen the magazine in which he describes his travels. A smart journalist has been given his material and the result is one article instead of the series of which Honeycomb dreamed. But it is magnificently illustrated. Not with colour photographs, for nothing came of them. Instead, an American illustrator has let himself go and drawn jungle orgies, prowling Indians and all sorts of mortal dangers in black and poisonous green.



Honeycomb never got to the Chavantes Indians. Instead, they made a trip by train, car and motor-boat to a little village on the Atlantic coast. Honeycomb complains horribly about the food. There was no ice-water and no fruit juice on their breakfast table. They had to eat strange Brazilian things.

Their experiences on Marajo were embroidered with a couple of gauchos who were killed by wild buffaloes, and Honeycomb seems to have caught an anaconda with his bare hands and to have leaped from his horse on to the neck of an ant-eater.

He never went as far as the Indians. Even the Government seems to have discovered that it was not worth the trouble to put them in contact with the more peaceable tribes. To make up for that they had tried to go a little way up one of the small tributaries on their own. They erected their tent on the shore, where no one else will pitch a tent because it is on the banks that mosquitoes swarm and you get malaria. There they played at

soldiers and pirates with the trees, and it was all very exciting. The natives who took them up river, stole their equipment and sailed off: just like in the real books. They had to live on chocolate and that sort of thing for several days, till some Cabocles came along in another canoe and for kind words and a certain amount of money took them back to the town.

They fell out with the local inhabitants. One night Mr. Honeycomb thought he heard a man sneaking into their hut. He drew out his revolver, fired it, and shouted: "The next time I shoot to kill!"

"We were not disturbed after that!" On that triumphant note he ends that section of his story.

Thanks to Hollywood, one can still get excitement out of life.

Every day he had to clean his precious firearms. His cameras fell to pieces. They were far too warm in their smart tropical hammocks. The rainy season began and everything was swamped. Their shoes got mouldy, and anything made of leather burst.

Then he got malaria, this time in earnest.

They ended by taking my advice and going to Manaus by river steamer. From there they flew home to the U.S.A.

"I'll be going back," is the last thing Honeycomb says to the journalist who helped him to write the article. I can distinctly see the look in his truthful blue eyes as he said that! "Then I am going to go up the Rio Jurua to its source in the Peruvian highlands. It's a wild, unknown part of the world. I'll take the first photographs of the savage Indians up there. I expect to be away more than a year; but I don't think my wife will be coming with me. It will be a marvellous trip."



A good many people have been killed because they wanted to be the first to photograph savage Indians. I devoutly hope that Honeycomb will never start. That, too, I know, is what the Brazilian authorities hope. He was such a nice simple-hearted chap, that I hate to think of large black ants crawling all over him.

On the other hand, I have no doubt but that he could write the book of all time on the Amazon, if he should complete the trip and get back home alive. Especially now that I have seen what he could make of an expedition that never took him a step outside those parts where ordinary people live and work. Honeycomb plus the unknown Amazon would be a combination to put all other travel writers in the shade, and such a book would make all the other Honeycombs in the world sell their goods and chattels and sally forth to meet death under some bush three miles from Belem's market square.

They will be killed by their indomitable thirst for adventure and their own imaginations.



## CHAPTER V

### *In a Hammock to Marajo*

"TAKING it all in all," I said to myself, "these Honeycombs are just ordinary people. Divest them of their American accent, take away their hammock with its revolver-pocket and their mosquito-net with its zip-fastener, and in a shower bath they will look no different from the rest of us.

"All this about supermen is just something for the cartoons in popular magazines and the late Mr. Hitler's disordered imagination. If the Honeycombs can go on an expedition to Marajo and come back with tales of wild buffaloes, poisonous snakes seventy-five feet long, malaria and dysentery, you can do so as well. Or at least you can try. You owe that to your readers."

That's what I told myself and I repeated it later to one of my Brazilian friends in the Club Para as we sat philosophizing about existence and the temperature of beer during the customary hours of afternoon quiet.

"Marajo?" said he. "Is that all you want? Can you start this evening?"

"Start?" said I. "Can you just go to Marajo like that? Don't you need a lot of equipment? Oughtn't I to get hold of some bearers, guides and that sort of thing?"

"You can go with Joaquim Neves this evening. He's taking his whole family. They have a house there where they spend their summer holidays. They're going across in their private motor-boat."



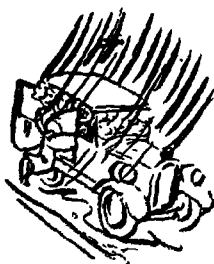
"Motor-boat!" said I, feeling almost insulted. "The Honeycombs are being taken to the Indian country in a government aeroplane in the charge of two experts."

"That's because it's cheaper for the Government to do that than to fit out a relief expedition in two months time, as it would have to were they allowed to go off on their own. And you don't need two people to take you about. Neves is a big, sensible man quite capable of seeing that you don't fiddle with things that you aren't supposed to touch. Then, there's only the one of you. The Honeycombs are two. Also you must remember that they come from powerful America, but you only from little Denmark, which is not quite the same thing. famous as it is for its agricultural products, it's Tivoli, and Hans Andersen."

My friend is the Danish Consul in Belem. His knowledge of Denmark is purely professional but he knows a tremendous amount about the Amazon, for he was born in Obidos far away upstream and has been in business in Belem all his life. That is why he is also the worst possible source for a writer if he comes to Amazonas hoping to get tropical romance and jungle mysticism.

It was pouring with rain that evening at eight o'clock when Neves drove up before the Hotel Grande and I hopped into his little car with my suitcase. As far as I could see in the dark, the car already contained four children, six women, Neves and his chauffeur.

Down by the warehouses lay a small tug jerking at its moorings. It was blowing fairly hard from the west. Except for a faint glimmer from the engine-room skylight, there wasn't a light to be seen anywhere. The rain blotted everything out. The boat was covered with an awning over its entire length, and tarpaulins hung



down to the gunwale on the windward side. The last of the baggage was being carried on board from the quay: large wooden packing cases, big tins, bundles, and pails.

"Food," said Neves with a broad grin. "Farofa!"

He spoke to me as though he were talking to a deaf mute, with picturesque gestures and a wide-open mouth. Like so many others, he didn't seem to catch on that I really spoke fluent Portuguese.

My spirits, already depressed by the matter-of-course way in which people here regarded an expedition to Marajo and by the perpetual rain, plumbed the depths when I heard the word *farofa* and saw the joyous, hospitable smile that accompanied it. Farofa is the national dish of Brazil. It is made of manioc root and tastes, at its best, like a mixture of sawdust and pulverized chalk. They use it lovingly to ruin every meal. When you have a wonderfully juicy beefsteak on your plate, a waiter sneaks up behind you, and before you can say knife, he has buried it under a heap of farofa.

Try putting four cream crackers into your mouth at the same time and chew them well; then you will have some idea of how farofa tastes and feels in your mouth.

Your throat closes; your gums dry up. The farofa squeezes up into your nostrils and sideways into the channels of your ears, but none of it slips down your throat. And it doesn't matter how much liquid you take, it never gets wet. Farofa is one of the reasons why it is very doubtful whether Brazil will ever attract many immigrants from Europe.

It looked as though we had plenty of farofa. There were six tins full. Some of it was coarse and toasted, Neves told me proudly: his wife's speciality.



I knew it well. That kind is like fine pearls: the same hardness and the same taste. The difficulties of an expedition to Marajo suddenly came tumbling over me from an unexpected direction. But luckily I got something else to think about. Beatrix was up on the quay shouting to me to catch her two dolls. Apart from my own wicked kids, Beatrix is the sweetest child I've ever met. The only other exception is, perhaps, her little sister Caroline, but she is only three years old, and at that age all young things are sweet. Beatrix is six.

My head was continually bumping against birdcages. Whatever the reason, Brazilians always travel with canaries in cages and hang them up in the most careless places. Then I stumbled over a dog and Beatrix bellowed at me, but I was able to show her that her dolls had taken no harm. It was only my skin that had suffered.

There was I on a rain-sodden deck, thunder rolling round the sky and continual flashes of lightning flickering all round the horizon; there was the Amazon gurgling between the boat and the quay, and I was on my way to Marajo. I was going to the island where anything can happen, and I had to look after a couple of dolls for a six-year-old girl, bang my head against canaries in cages, and eat farofa morning, afternoon and evening.

I only remember one similar occasion. That was when I was in the U.S.A. and for the first time met one of the heroes of my childhood, a genuine Blackfoot Indian. I came across him out in the prairie, where it is a long way to the horizon and coyotes howl on dark nights. He was wearing moccasins, had an eagle's gaze and a black fringe. The first thing he asked me was whether my camera was a Contax or a Leica, and the second, whether

I wanted to photograph him in his feathers, for, if so, that would cost a dollar.

However, I soon had something else to think about.

We were all aboard. Neves pulled the cord of the whistle and an ear-piercing screech sped out into the rain as a signal to the man at the engine. Then Neves turned to me and said that it would be best to hang up our hammocks now.

In the Amazon States a hammock is as essential a part of your travelling equipment as a mosquito net. There are hammocks for the poor, that are just an oblong piece of canvas and a couple of ends of rope; there are profiteer's hammocks with fringes and tassels and fine, hand-woven patterns, and since the Honeycombs came, there are also hammocks with revolver-pockets. Mine was one of the in-between ones. I had bought it that same afternoon. It had cost twenty-five shillings, and the salesman had assured me that it would last out my life-time. My friend, the Danish consul, who was with me, told him that as I was going on a trip up the river and into the jungle, that was a remark I was not likely to appreciate or regard as a convincing guarantee of the hammock's durability.

The Consul had told me that I needed no instruction in how to hang it up. Everywhere I had been, in the hotels, boats, and in the huts of the poor rubber collectors, I must have seen the row of strong iron hooks in the walls from which people hung their hammocks. You see, except in the large hotels and in the homes of the well-to-do, a bed is a quadruped unknown in the Amazon district.

I found a couple of the inevitable hooks and slung my hammock. There was nothing difficult about that. It





was a snug spot close to the bulk-head of the deck-house. It was polite of them, I thought, to leave their guest the place nearest the lee-screen!

The four hammocks were already occupied. The rest of the company dangled forward. On the deck, under the hammocks, were their suit cases, some tin pails, agricultural instruments, and a chamber-pot that was part of Caroline's travelling equipment. With all that, if the ropes broke and you fell, it would at least wake you up.



Hammocks are like horses: you must get accustomed to them. They are temperamental. Some are gentle, others restless. The one I had bought was definitely of the buck-jumper type, but that I did not realize at the beginning. I had begun spreading my mosquito net over the hammock. If you have never slept under a mosquito net, you won't realize that such a piece of thin, light gauze is itself alive. It snuggles tenderly round you, when you fumble in the dark for the corner where the tape is; it lays itself softly across your eyes and then without warning whips round your throat, seizes it brutally in a strangle hold, and squeezes.

Just as I thought I had got hold of the tape, a gust of wind came and sent the gauzy stuff flapping out of control. I lunged out frantically to right and left hoping to be able to get the fifteen square yards of frenzied material under control without too much noise. Just as success seemed within my grasp there was a shrill scream from the next hammock.

That was Beatrix, who had stuck her head over the rim of her hammock. Beatrix believed in ghosts.

Neves came rushing up with a life buoy in his hands and disentangled me.

"You don't need that," he said. "We never use a net on the river."

"No?" I said, and smiled, as though I had only packed it for a joke.

"Good-night," said I, and flung myself backwards with tight shut eyes, into my hammock.

I bumped hard against a water-can, a petrol tin, and a wooden case that lay under the hammock, and tried to jump out of the hammock again. But a hammock is not a spring-board. It holds on to what it has.

Neves helped me out.

"You didn't stretch it tight enough," he said, and did it for me.

Then I sat carefully on the edge. This time it held, so I lay back. It still held. I let myself sink down into it and the two sides closed over my tired head. It was like lying in a toothpaste tube. A moment later I was asleep. I must have slept for about a quarter of an hour, and then we got out into the bay. There was no other noise to be heard but the howling of the wind, the throb of the engine, and the murmur of the river at the bows. But a bit of a sea had got up, and we were beginning to pitch. I opened my eyes and smiled into the darkness.

"At last," I said to myself. "A storm on the Amazon!"

Then the boat gave a lurch, and my hammock bumped brutally hard against the deck-house. Half a second later I received a thump from the other side. Then the boat swung back, lurched over again, and again I bumped against the hard bulkhead, again I was given a squeeze from the other side. Beatrix began to cry. There was a restless stirring in the other hammocks. I stuck my head over the edge. Immediately my hammock began to heel over, so that I had to hold on tight with both hands, while



I peered out to see what was up. It was logical enough according to the laws of the pendulum.

The five hammocks hung side by side. When the boat rolled, they swung gracefully with it from side to side, like well-trained chorus girls, keeping time with but not touching each other. But when my hammock was interrupted in the middle of its outward swing by the wall of the deck-house, it of course stopped the other four and made them crash into each other, like a house of cards when it tumbles.



So, it wasn't the laws of hospitality that had made them leave me the sheltered place. There shouldn't have been a hammock there at all.

"Can't you get to sleep?" Mrs. Neves asked, in friendly sympathy, from out of a forest of curl-papers.

"Aah!" I said. "I think I'll take a turn."

I swung my right leg out of the hammock and stepped straight into Caroline's pot that had slid along the deck with the motion until it reached the strategic spot on to which I should have to step. It had been used. As I swung my other leg out to get my balance it knocked over one of the tins and the lid came off.

"Aah, Joaquim—all my lovely farofa!" cried Mrs. Neves, and the entire boat was wide awake and staring at me.

"That's some small consolation," I thought bitterly, but too soon, for Joaquim was already on his knees on the deck busily scraping what had been spilt back into the tin with his hand.

"No harm done, little mother," he said.

Then the boat came in the lee of an island, and the rolling stopped as suddenly as it had begun. I went back to my hammock and, exhausted, fell asleep.

An ear-splitting toot woke me at four in the morning. We had arrived. Through the rain I could see the black outlines of land. We had taken six hours. I tried to sit up, but it was difficult for I felt as though the hammock had turned me during the night into something very like a banana. Neves saw what was wrong, but he was a Brazilian gentleman to his finger tips.

"It's strange," he said, "how even the most ordinary things vary from nation to nation. You lie lengthways in a hammock, but we always sleep diagonally, aslant it. I don't believe I could sleep properly lying the way you did. But, of course, it's all a question of habit."

Then he packed up my hammock, as it should be packed, and we went ashore on Marajo.

Since then my hammock has been my inseparable friend and guide, I have hung it up in the best hotels, even when there was a good, broad bed to tempt me. This was partly due to a wish to impress the chambermaid, but apart from that, there are great advantages in a hammock. For instance, there is a limit to the number of fleas that can be housed in its thin material; and if rats want to sniff at you they must first climb a perpendicular wall and then walk the tightrope down the cord. Not many of them can do that. In the Hotel Grande in Belem I kept a tin of American toffees on my night table and they ate the lot in the most shameless fashion. And in the mornings I could find their receipts on my pillow.

Marajo is the little island you will find on the map in the middle of the mouth of the Amazon, or rather between the northern and southern arms formed by the river as it flows out into the Atlantic. Nor is "little" quite the right word to use, for it is nearly a thousand square miles larger than Denmark; but in comparison



with the length of the Amazon and the size of Brazil, it doesn't look much of a place on the map.

Marajo lies rather off the beaten track. Nobody goes there on business. It is owned by a few large *fazendeiros* who are mostly engaged in cattle-ranching. The majority have made themselves quite nice fortunes, and when I say "quite nice" I am thinking in terms of Brazilian fortunes. Few of them live permanently on the island. Many live in Rio, and some have large businesses in Belem and only go to the island occasionally to inspect their property or for a holiday.

Communications are so bad that you sometimes wonder whether they have really heard that slavery was abolished in 1888, for they have there what is so charmingly called a "feudal system." Being an isolated community, the workmen are entirely dependent on their masters. Naturally they are paid wages, as the law demands, according to the appropriate scale; but as communications with the mainland are so poor, they are obliged to buy all the foodstuffs and clothes they need in shops run by their employers. However, the Brazilian *fazendeiro* is a good employer and does not exploit his people. He was also the most humane slave-owner in the world, who never used a whip on a bowed back. Even though you know all that, it still gives you an uncomfortable feeling when an old man humbly kneels in front of you, kisses your knee, and begins removing your tall riding-boots the moment you enter your room. Such things, of course, will die out with these old folk, with whom it is an ingrained habit. How strange it is to think that these men and women who are still doing their jobs on the fazenda, were born slaves and remained slaves till they



were fifteen or twenty. Yet they don't feel humiliated by that, nor need they do so.

A light came jerking down the long pile-bridge that led across the swamp to a house we could vaguely glimpse on the bank. It was not till it had almost reached us and we were able to examine it more closely, that we saw that there was an old negro attached to the handle of the lantern. With him to guide us, we staggered in over the bridge, falling over the rails of a light railway and bumping into stacks of barrels. A petrol engine was started somewhere in the big building and a moment later the filaments began to glow in the electric light bulbs in the lamps on the corners of the house. We went up some steps and walked into a living-room on the first floor.

It was 30 feet long, 37 feet broad, and the ceiling was 45 feet high. Some chairs stood round a table; there was an ice-box in one corner, and five or six American rocking-chairs in a row along one side. Behind some gauze curtains I could glimpse an altar that occupied one whole end wall of an adjacent room. It was now half-past four.

Joaquim Neves bade me welcome, and walking across to the gramophone put on *God bless America*. I didn't care. Then the whole family sat each in his chair and began rocking in time to the music. I made my way to my room and flung myself down on the bed. As I fell asleep, I was vaguely aware that the music had changed to Gene Krupa's band and that the rhythm of the rocking-chairs had altered with it.

I was woken by a piercing cock-crow beneath the window of my room and by a pretty girlish voice calling the Portuguese equivalent of "Chook! Chook!" Then another young girl came in with a tray and my morning coffee. It was all very nice and homely. The homeliness,



however, came to a sudden end when I stuck my head out of the window and blinked at the sun. A pink ibis with a curved beak was strutting about among the hens picking up their maize. The girl was as black as soot, and on the roof of the shed on the other side of the hen-run was a red and green parrot screeching to high heaven because a tethered ape had caught hold of its tail feathers and wouldn't let go.



Some kindly soul had put two mangoes on my night-table. They were so large they would hardly fit on to the plate.

In front of the shed stood a man washing. He had a hat on and a cigarette in his mouth. He managed to avoid wetting the cigarette.

So I was on Marajo! Actually I wasn't on the island itself, but on another little one just off the coast. It was no larger than three square miles and thickly covered with trees. Neves did not even count it among his possessions. It was merely a plot on which the house was built, and also the site of a sugar refinery that produced  $2\frac{3}{4}$  tons of sugar a day. His land proper was on the main island and he didn't rightly know how many acres he did have, nor had he himself ever been over the whole of it. He only knew that beside all that land on the main island and the little island on which the house stood, he also owned several other islands and rivers. He made sugar, brandy, soap and edible oil. He had cattle on the campo and pigs that roamed the woods eating themselves fat on oil-nuts that countless palms showered down generously. He employed zoo men who, of course, all lived on the estate, scattered here and there about it. Many of them had been in the family's service for generations.

Bygone generations gazed stiffly down at the breakfast table from ornamental, ant-proof frames: faded enlargements of long-necked women with large gold brooches, and men with waxed moustaches and high collars; generations of rich planters, patriarchs who had had the right of life and death over hundreds of illiterate workers.

I went for a stroll in the hen-run and counted twenty-seven different kinds of fruit trees, their heavily laden branches bowed above my head. These were none of the kinds I have in my own garden and I did not know them all. At any rate there were the yellow lanterns of cacaos, oranges, lemons, bananas, coconuts, passion fruit, limes, mangoes, paras, grape fruit, avocado pears, papayas, jacas, caju, and fig trees. Here and there about the place were ripe pineapples. No, it was not in the least like my garden. All the same, in mine I have kale and early potatoes.

Neves called to me from the courtyard: "Come and see my little pet." And I went unsuspectingly, eating a mango, and got a shock. The little pet was a boa-constrictor about five feet long: one of the ones Neves kept in his cellar. Thanks to them, there was not a single rat on his property.

The boa was twisting wildly in the grass and Neves was preventing it from escaping by continually teasing it with a stick. It was in a proper frenzy. Then Neves placed the end of the stick just behind its head and pressed the brute down against the ground. It was caught fast, twisted itself round the stick and performed the wildest contortions, hissing all the while.

"That's the only way to take hold of them," said Neves





and, bending down, he seized it just behind its head with his left hand and dropped the stick.

"It's pretty agile," said I, just for the sake of saying something.

"Hold it," he said. "It can't do anything."

And so I had to hold it. It was not a pleasant feeling when that long, firm body wound itself round my forearm. Then it squeezed, so hard that I noticed my pulse beating more quickly. I would hate to have a fight with a ten-foot boa. Some of them grow to twenty-six feet.

"I have four others in the cellar," said Neves proudly. "They are better ratters and mousers than any cat."

And so the days passed. We went on long trips—I beg your pardon! We went on strenuous expeditions on horseback, on foot, and in canoes that were hollowed-out tree-trunks. We saw crocodiles lying dozing in the shallow lakes in the centre of the island, but we didn't shoot any of them, for what can you do with a dead crocodile? We slipped down small tributaries under arching tree-tops that shut out most of the daylight. There mangrove-roots stood in regular rows, like a fence, along either bank, and from every trunk dangled the tough tendrils of lianas, some of them as thin as twine, others gnarled and as thick as the stoutest hawser. Yet, apart from the few large blue butterflies that gleamed like flakes of enamel here and there above our heads, and some fish that occasionally glided beneath our canoe, there was seldom any other life to be seen.

The jungle is the deadest of all the different forms of wood there are in the world. The lianas are so closely tangled and the forest floor of fallen leaves, rotting stems and luxuriantly growing plants so thick, that every creature can hide either behind or in them. A rustle on



the floor of the forest or under the leaves can be a snake, but more often it is some four-legged creature, a mouse or something else equally harmless. Each attends to its own affairs; incurious they avoid each other, for it might not be so pleasant if one lifted a few leaves to have a look at the quadruped and it proved to be a snake.

There is a continual gentle splashing as nuts drop from the palm-trees into the river, oil-bearing nuts about the size of a golf ball, and with its diamond pattern, but of a glaring red. Occasionally one will fall on your head, and that soon teaches you to wear a topee, even though the heat is so intense beneath that light roof of leaves that the sweat runs down your forehead and into your eyes, making them smart.

The fish you see most of in the river here have two pairs of eyes. The one is turned upwards and can follow the restless flight of the insects, the other looks ahead and below on the watch for possible dangers. The upper pair sticks up above the water, the lower remains under the surface. It sounds like one of Baron Münchhausen's inventions, but it is Nature's own. There are more spheres than one thinks, where Nature competes with that genial liar.

These four-eyed fish are to be seen all about the river, wherever the water is shallow. They usually go in shoals, and the first time you see one, you think it is a snake swimming across, because the two upper eyes leave a thin wake in the water. When you paddle closer to have a look, the fish increases speed suddenly, slashes with its tail and rises up like a speed boat, and so races across the surface with its entire fore part lifted out of the water, steering itself with just the last stump of its tail-fin. There are countless numbers of them.



One day we were making for a clearing in the dense forest. The river described a hair-pin bend round a point about a mile wide and round this we were to go. To lighten the canoes, for the water was shallow and full of whirlpools, Neves suggested that he and I and a couple of the cabocles should wade ashore and walk across the point which was covered with nothing worse than grass and small bushes.

We took off our shoes and stockings and crawled towards the bank through the mangrove roots. Never have I been anywhere where there was so much mud in one place. It was of a greyish-brown colour and had the consistence of soft dough. Our legs sank in it up to the knee, and each time we laboriously hauled one leg out to take a step forward, it came free with a report like a rifle-shot. When the four of us waded up over the bank it sounded as though a battle was in progress. But we got up, and then set off through the tall grass.

The grass was sharp and full of all sorts of thorned plants, and suddenly it occurred to me that I was bare-footed and that my shoes were in the canoe now well on its way to the farther side of the point. The next thing I thought of was snakes. However, if the others could do this, so could I. Perhaps, it was just nonsense all that talk about your having to wear boots, preferably high-boots, in the Amazon jungle. Luckily I was second in the line, following Neves, who was walking at the head tramping a path through the grass. It was a comforting thought, but not for long, for then I remembered that a man in Belem had told me that the one who went in front in the jungle seldom got bitten by a snake. He just woke them and made them coil up. It was almost always the second in the line at whom they struck.



A stretch of dry grass is the rattlesnake's favourite playground.

But, after all, the others were barefooted too. Of course, the cabocle's skin is so well tanned that a rattlesnake's teeth will hardly be able to get through it. Yet Neves—suddenly I felt a stab of pain in my left foot. I let out a yell. Neves span round, and asked sympathetically: "Have you stuck yourself on something?"

I nodded, but agreed with myself that perhaps it would be rather infantile to let him see what I was thinking at that moment. And it couldn't have helped, as we had no serum with us.

I didn't get as much out of the rest of the trip as I ought; but that didn't really matter as I was able later to have a proper look at the virgin jungle and its small muddy rivers.

The perspicacious reader will already have realized that it was not a snake.

When I got home that evening I scrubbed an inch of dried cracked mud off my legs, and on my left foot I found too flaming red spots a good quarter of an inch apart. They looked like pin-pricks and beneath them were two not so brightly coloured scratches, as though the pins had been scraped a little way across the skin as they were withdrawn.

As a rule snake poison kills within twenty-four hours. If you can get through that period there is hope that nothing will happen to you. The next morning I was as fit as a fiddle. Now, at this distance of time, I don't mind admitting that I did not have much of an appetite for supper that evening, that the pricks were made by two small thorns, and that I have never since walked bare-

foot across a piece of grass if there was the least suspicion that it might harbour rattlesnakes.

My next adventure occurred a couple of days later, when we were out on a long ride across the campo. I have never been much use on a horse, and if there is the least possibility of going by bicycle, I prefer to do so. If not, then I'd rather walk, unless there's a taxi to be had. You will understand, then, that I heaved a sigh of relief when we parked our horses, while Neves and his people got off to talk with a foreman who lived alone in a little hut in the flat country where the pampas grass here and there gives place to bushes and thick virgin woods.



I tied my horse to a tree, picked up my camera and sauntered off into the plain to see if I could find anything worth photographing. When I did, I wished that I hadn't.

Five hundred yards from where we had tethered the horses I heard a curious splashing and snorting coming from a hollow. It sounded exactly like an elderly asthmatic man taking a bath. When I reached the top of the rise and was able to look over, I discovered that I had guessed correctly. There below me, in a red muddy pool, so covered with mud that you could only see his head and a bit of his back, lay an enormous, aged water-buffalo, a brute with a pair of horns that would have impressed me even had I seen them from behind the safety of bars in a zoo. It was lying with its eyes closed, seemingly thoroughly enjoying life. But just as I had crept over the edge, it opened its eyes and stared straight at me.

Here you must submit to a lengthy parenthesis, if you are to understand the full implication of this.

You can't have helped at some time hearing or read-

ing about the African Cape buffalo. Anyone who has been on safari in Africa speaks of it with the deepest respect and with a slight quaver in his voice, for when provoked, a buffalo is the most dangerous animal in the world.

Now, the water-buffalo of Marajo is first cousin to the Cape buffalo, and only not so well known because Cooks' Wagon Lits don't yet run tours with native guides and white hunters to the Amazon delta. They roam the great plains in considerable numbers and the natives thoroughly dislike meeting them, for they are vicious, wily and as quick as lightning. When they attack, they won't stop till their victim is ground to a pulp.

This brute in the hollow was quite distinctly put out. It gazed fixedly at me. Then it wrinkled its brow and began to move. Its fore-legs stamped the mud, and slowly it heaved itself up with a squelch. At the first note of that squelch I started for the nearest tree and when it ended, I was sitting on a seemingly secure branch fifteen feet up with the lens of my camera pointing between the brute's eyes in the faint hope that it might think I had an elephant rifle.

I could see the red mud slithering down off its flanks as, angrily snorting, it made its way towards dry land and my tree. Then, to complete my discomfiture, I saw the bushes bending down and the trees swaying on the other side of the hollow, and out of the edge of the wood came five—ten—fifteen buffaloes, bulls, cows and calves, all grunting and snorting, their elephant-grey flanks heaving like bellows. I was surrounded.

This was the sort of thing you read about in thrilling travel books. The only thing left was for a boa-constrictor to slip down towards me in gentle coils from the



top of the tree. No sooner had I thought that than I heard a high-pitched hiss below me. I clutched a branch and looked down.

It was Neves.

"Huyetschch!" said he, and waved his arms, as you do when trying to drive hens away from a trough. "Huyetschch! Hop it, you old cow!"



And I saw the great bull turn aside, saw it stalk sedately across the slope to mingle with the others, who stood there stupidly staring.

Out from the wood came a couple of gauchos with leather hats and sticks in their hands. They smacked the buffaloes on the hind-quarters and shouted at them to set them moving again.

"I told them to drive the buffaloes together, so that you could get some good pictures of them," Neves called up to me. "But I see that you've discovered them for yourself. Did you get a good picture of the bull in the mud hollow? It was a good idea to climb up into the tree and get a bird's-eye view. It's not often you have the luck to get so close, when they take their baths. They are pretty shy as a rule."

Slowly I clambered down from the tree, holding the camera in my teeth. What was annoying was that I had sworn to write the truth and nothing but the truth about my trip to the Amazon. Otherwise what a story I could have made out of that! But, as it is, it's not a bad one.

In the wild state the buffalo is really a very dangerous creature, and Neves is one of the few fazendeiros in Brazil who have attempted to tame the Marajo variety. His gauchos catch them with lassos and then let them go in an enclosure where they are able to get accustomed to seeing people. If there are never more than a score

there at a time, they can be tamed very quickly. If there are more than that, it is impossible to tame them at all.

Turning buffaloes into domestic animals is not only a sport, but also a highly lucrative enterprise. These mighty creatures, which are far larger and more powerful than the Zebu cattle that normally are herded on the meagre campo grass, give a milk-yield of from 18 to 20 litres a day, and the fat content of their milk is as high as that of Jersey cows, despite the fact that the buffaloes receive no addition to their diet of dry grass.

There are thousands of water-buffalo on Marajo, and Neves anticipates great results from his experiment.

Boa-constrictors as mousers in your cellar, dangerous buffaloes as milk kine in your pen, yes—that is adventure enough on this little island of Marajo.



## CHAPTER VI

### *Christmas in Belem*



THE spirit of Christmas had come to Belem, diluted, in no way comparable to what we experience at home, but still the Christmas spirit. In the first place Belem was groaning with the heat and gasping for air. There were no more lights in the streets than usual; the shop windows remained unchanged, and I sniffed in vain for the smell of vanilla and gingerbread that characterizes the narrow streets of Denmark at this time of the year.

In the Catholic countries Christmas is not the great family festival it is in the North. The people do give each other small presents and go to church at midnight on Christmas eve, but there is none of that intimate, indescribable feeling of solidarity that makes members of a family bury the hatchet for a few days, and that for twenty-four hours softens even the most mercenary soul. And so it was strange to see that some of our Northern Christmas customs have been taken and transplanted in the tropical soil of Amazonas.

On the afternoon before Christmas I was sitting in the pavement restaurant of the Hotel Grande, when, to my utter astonishment I saw a coal-black negro with sweat pouring down his naked torso coming down the street balancing a three-foot snowman on his head.

There he was glistening with frost, top-hatted, with coal buttons and carrot nose, carefully hugging his broom, while everyone else in the town was on the point of melting.

Of course, his body was made of cotton-wool, his hat of papier-maché and the particles of frost of tinsel, but he was a snowman all the same. As a shock, it was almost too violent.

Cotton-wool snow was also the main element in the few attempts made to decorate displays of presents in some of the shop windows. And this was a country where not one in a thousand had ever seen snow in any form, where Christmas comes during the worst of the summer's hellish heat. Understand it if you can.

It is always the same shoe-black who cleans my shoes, a charming cheeky mulatto lad with a mass of black curls and the suppleness of a snake. He fell upon me the day I arrived in the mistaken belief that I was an American, and for that reason persisted in demanding a shilling for his labours instead of the customary three-pence that non-Americans give.

We might have started a brawl, had I not discovered that the boy had a sense of humour and he that I did not come from America, but from a curious land of mist whose natives have neither chewing-gum nor dollars. After that, we came to the conclusion that actually we were both rather nice. Ever since, he has had the monopoly of my shoes, and I have been left in peace by the rest of the horde of black-fingered, dark-eyed boys who sit there like vultures waiting to pounce upon any new victim who should sit down in front of the hotel. They respect each other's regular customers, but on the new-comer anyone can prey.

The morning before Christmas the boy came over to me as usual, turned up the ends of my trousers, thrust his stool under my foot, and gave the shoe the customary introductory pat. He cleaned my shoes as he always did



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and the result was neither better nor worse than normal. We chatted about the weather and about how dreadful it was that the Americans were going to send their troops home, so that there wouldn't be nearly so many to pay a shilling instead of the normal threepence. When he had finished I got my usual beaming grin, and as it was Christmas after all, I fished a shilling out of my pocket and gave it to him. When he started rummaging for change, I told him paternally that I didn't want change, that it was Christmas and so he was to have the whole shilling for himself, but *only* this once.

His face lit up with all the light and warmth of a real Christmas tree, he seized the coin, threw it high up into the air, caught it and danced off in and out among the tables shouting over and over again: "I've had a Christmas present. I've been given a shilling. The fat foreigner there gave me a whole shilling."

People were beginning to look at me, and I was growing angry. *Must* the boy dance about under the waiters' noses proclaiming to all and sundry that I had paid black market prices for shoe-cleaning? After all, it was no more than he and his friends got out of the Americans every time they cleaned their shoes. I buried myself behind a newspaper.

After ten minutes or so I felt something or someone fiddling with my feet. Looking down, I saw that it was the boy again. His black curly mop of hair was bowed over my shoes, one of which he had already smeared with polish.

At that I lost my temper. The waiters also seemed to think that he had gone too far, and one of them came across, heaved him up by his shirt which was made out of an old flour bag, and told him to be off. When a

customer had been nice to him, he oughtn't to be importunate or try to get him to repeat the performance. There was nothing more for him to do there, and he was to make himself scarce.

My wrath subsided somewhat. After all, it was Christmas. I knew very well that the lad was poor, and perhaps he was hard pressed for money. I motioned the waiter away.

At that moment the boy lifted his head, looked at the waiter out of the blackest eyes I have ever seen, and, with a wry smile at me that was half-way between tears and laughter, said to him:

"I don't want any money. I won't take any money, neither to-day, to-morrow, nor the next day. I was given a Christmas present and when I looked at his shoes again, they didn't seem to have been polished quite so well as they could have been."

There you have the essence of the Brazilian character. You can curse and swear as much as you like at the zealous officials and slow waiters, at the lazy porters and corruptible policemen, at those who irritate you beyond measure by playing cards, picking their teeth, or dozing in a chair, when you have three minutes in which to catch a train, or to keep an appointment on which the whole future of the world depends. Yet, when you see one of those smiles which seem to say that you can dance and hop as much as you like, your trashy money won't make any difference if you aren't *simpatico*, when they give you one of those smiles, you are disarmed and forgive them everything. It is such a shock to come across people to whom money, though it means a lot, is not everything, and who will refuse to sell a thing if they



don't like the purchaser's manner, that for that alone you can forgive them anything.

I was prevented from having the lad to eat at my table, because he didn't know what table-manners were. I wonder if we haven't a false estimation of what culture is?

There was an Englishman at the table next to mine. He had been following the little episode with benevolent interest, and now turned to me and said: "Christmas spirit, eh? Would you like to come with me and watch Christmas presents being given to the poor? The Rotary Club is making its annual distribution of presents. We have given cards to 600 of the poorest people in the town and they are coming to fetch their presents this afternoon."



We drove out to a large school building. In front of its closed iron gates stood a long queue of children by themselves and in their mother's arms. They were all in their finest clothes, washed and clean, with starched bows in their hair and sticky-out cotton skirts. Inside, in the cool dusky schoolrooms the Rotarians' wives and daughters were busied at long tables arranging dolls, boxes of bricks, Ludo, and picture books. Electric light shone coldly from the branches of an imitation Christmas tree. Some girls were grouped round the piano practising carols.

Then the doors were opened and the queue let in. Three policemen kept order and saw that those at the end did not press forward too eagerly. However, the children were well-behaved and orderly. Suspense and anticipation made them serious, and their were very solemn little faces as they marched into the hall where they split: the boys going one way, the girls another.



An Anaconda has been caught





As the two lines filed past the long tables loaded with presents, each child received a parcel.

Beside the door through which they filed out sat the lady with the sweets: one bag of goodies and a three-penny bit was the ration.

After that it was all over as far as the Rotarians were concerned; but for the children this was when the fun really began. Some of the tension left their faces. That was over. Without properly understanding how it had happened—they had been far too excited and tense for that—they had been given a present and they now stood there hugging their dolls and toy ships. They hugged them tight with both arms, still not quite sure what to think, and looking fearfully from side to side, lest someone should be coming to take away their toys, goodies and threepenny pieces.

However, when nothing happened, the strained look left their faces, and from being shy awkward puppets, they became live, entranced children. The little girls hugged their dolls closer still, felt the material of the dress, let a small hand glide carefully over the canary-yellow hair, far too happy even to hear their mother's, or big sister's whispered, "Did you say thank you to the lady? *Did* you say thank you?"

Their own toy! Their only toy.

A wonderful light came into those large dark childish eyes. They sat on the steps in the blazing sunshine and busied themselves with their toys.

Six hundred children had filed past those present-laden tables. Six hundred times a couple of Christmas stars had been lit in a pair of dark eyes. As the lines of those waiting in silent, suppressed excitement had grown shorter and shorter, the school-yard had filled with



jubilant children, and when the last parcel had been handed over and the last bag of sweets given away, the children's excitement had turned into exuberant joy. It sounded as though a colourful flock of twittering birds had been loosed in the school buildings.

"How do you distribute the cards that entitle the children to presents?" I asked the man who had taken me there.

"Every member of the Rotary receives a number of cards which he hands out to families that either he or his wife consider could do with a little cheering up.

"Of course, six hundred is not much in a town of 200,000 inhabitants, but it is all we can afford. We haven't so many members, and there are many other forms of charity that call upon our resources in the course of the year.

"We would more than willingly give something to all who wanted it, including those," and he pointed towards the iron gate that was once more shut.

Behind it stood those who had not been given cards. They had come on the off-chance of there being something over, in case someone had not been able to use his card, or too many presents had been bought. They were the real poor of Belem.

Those who had received the cards were mostly children whose mothers were connected in one way or another with those who distributed the cards. They either did the washing, helped in the garden, took the kitchen refuse away, or delivered goods from a shop, or else they were near neighbours. There was, of course, no doubt about their poverty, but all the same most of them had some sort of employment that allowed them to live in the town and to buy a ribbon to put in the children's hair



on Christmas eve when they went to receive their presents.

Those on the wrong side of the iron gate came from the mud huts of the suburbs, from cabins down by the river. They were the ones who spent their nights under trees in the parks or under an upturned boat down by the port. They must have numbered six hundred too.

They had no freshly washed dresses to put on. Their only covering was a rag of sorts; their hair hung in straggling wisps; their arms and legs were mere bones with a little skin stretched over them. Those nearest the gate clung to its bars so tightly that their knuckles showed white, for they were the first, and if anything happened, they were not going to be shoved aside.

And something did happen. There were a few things left over: two or three boxes of bricks, a couple of games, and a single doll. A screech from those small toddlers, pregnant mothers and aged crones outside, greeted the appearance of the white woman with her armful of toys at the top of the steps, and avid arms thrust through the bars as far as they would go. The woman paused when she saw them, and was unable to hide a shudder of repulsion. Then she gave the parcels to the policemen and told them to distribute them.

There was a roar of inarticulate sounds, mumbled prayers and shrill entreaties, while the policemen arranged the parcels. That and the forest of emaciated begging arms stretched between the hard iron bars were so boundlessly tragic that my recollection of happy children laughing and chattering to the dolls in their laps was blotted out; its warmth chilled by icy horror.

There was no happy ending to that scene. No benefactor came along with presents for all; no one's heart



was softened by the pealing of Christmas bells. When the few crumbs had been distributed, there were just as many outstretched arms, as many eyes glowing in feverish pale faces, imploring for even the tiniest little gift.

Since then I have seen those outstretched bony hands wherever I went, and felt those hopeless eyes on whatever I myself was looking at. Those hands and eyes at least told me that Brazil has a long way yet to go, that it has centuries of injustice to expiate by creating better conditions for future generations and happier circumstances for the children of to-day.

I have met those who made their money in Amazonas' golden period. I have seen them casually sauntering down the marble steps into Copacabana's luxury casino, seen them losing 50,000 cruzeiros in the course of a night without moving a muscle in their blasé tanned faces. I have come across them in the night haunts of Paris, and I have seen their palaces on the Riviera. And I have met those they forgot when they raked their money together and journeyed south: the children and grand-children of the men who risked life and health to gather rubber for them in the unhealthiest parts of the jungle forests, hundreds of miles from the nearest town.

And there they stood on the wrong side of the gate. They live in wretched mud huts that in Europe would be condemned even as hen-houses, and their pale faces told an unmistakable tale of undernourishment and avitaminosis. Day in, day out, their fare is boiled beans and nothing else. They are riddled with malaria, consumption and diseases of the liver, they, the flotsam left by the wave of prosperity when it withdrew from Amazonas as suddenly as it had come. And their arms thrust through the bars of the gate were like the arms of those slowly

sinking in a bubbling bog where none can come to help them.

The bells began ringing a Christmas peal from the twin belfries of the cathedral. Inside, beneath the richly decorated arches above the golden altar stood a Christmas crib, a miniature reproduction of the nativity in Bethlehem: three richly clad sages bowed their knees before a little child lying swaddled in straw in a crib in a poor stall. Outside, three policemen were driving six hundred ragged children off the street, while men in spotless tropical suits and women in rustling silks looked on in irritation, taking care not to come in contact with those lousy, tattered kids. Then they passed through the door of the cathedral and bent their knees before the little child with the dark, burning eyes.

Christmas was being rung in in Belem which is the Portuguese for Bethlehem.

Andersen had said that I must go and spend Christmas eve with them. I had refused at first, not having met his family and because I knew that his wife and daughter only spoke Portuguese. Quite apart from that, it seemed to me an infliction to have a complete stranger in your home on just that evening. Unless, of course, it should be a stray tramp who came and knocked on your door as darkness was falling and the bells were ringing out. Him you would take in, give him some turkey and a piece of cake, and half-a-crown when he left, and it would only enhance the Christmas spirit and give you a lovely feeling of how really good you were. I, however, had the Hotel Grande and a large number of books waiting to be looked at, and anyway it is difficult to get into the proper Christmas spirit in a place where no one keeps Christmas

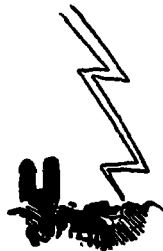


as we do and everything is as far removed from snow and sleigh-bells as it can be.

That was why I had said, "No, thank you," and proposed that we meet as usual for lunch in the hotel the next day. I could see from Andersen's face that he had meant his invitation. In fact, he said that it would ruin Christmas for him if he knew that there was a fellow-countryman in Belem and he not at his table.

Andersen is the only Dane permanently resident in Belem. He has a large ironmongery business, sells motor cars, and has several other good irons in the fire besides.

Great heavy clouds had been piling up all day. The heat had been unusually oppressive, and the few violent squalls that every now and then had burst upon the town and swept its streets clear of people, had not brought any relief. Steam had risen from the parks and the trees in the avenues between each squall.



On my way out to Andersen's house lightning was flaring all round the horizon. There was thunder in the air and the heat was like a thick eiderdown laid over the street. Every now and then a ripe mango would fall to the ground with a dull thud. After five minutes slow walking the back of my white tropical suit was already soaked with sweat. Bats flitted about my ears, looking curiously unreal against the background of the broad sheets of lightning that flickered continually, lighting up half the sky. I looked at a thermometer in a jeweller's shop window : just over 102 deg.

Wouldn't I have done better to have stayed at home and finished reading Ernie Poyle's *Here is your War*, and then crept early under my mosquito-net? At least I would have been able to spend the evening in pyjamas.

It was intolerable to have to wear jacket and tie; but you must when you are in Brazil.

"Take off your jacket, and roll up your sleeves," said Andersen. "This evening we're in Denmark."

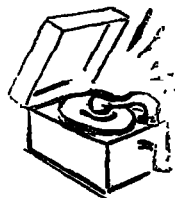
Down the long corridor from the kitchen came the most heavenly smell of goose and red cabbage.

"We do what we can," said Andersen. "Duck roasted like goose, white cabbage cooked like red, and *batata* fried like potatoes. But there is a real Danish sauce and real rice pudding."

What a strange creature man is. We remain unmoved when we read that not one of New York's inhabitants would be left alive if eight atom bombs were dropped on the city. We merely shrug our shoulders when we hear that there is famine in China; and we tell ourselves that all this fuss about Christmas is just sentimental nonsense and its only object to let the shopkeepers earn a little more money. And yet, there sat I, God help me, a big, grown man, and found a dampness about the corners of my eyes all because it was 24th December and there was a smell of red cabbage coming from the kitchen. And on any other day of the year what a fuss we would have made about the stench of cabbage all over the house!

After the meal we went into the living rooms that faced the street. Andersen and I were given coffee and home-made cakes in his study, while the rest of the family retired to the drawing-room adjoining. Andersen walked over to the gramophone and wound it up. It scratched a bit at first, then the needle dropped into the groove and the orchestra of the Life Guards began playing "By the mast King Christian stood."

We both stood up. Not stiffly at attention with our arms straight down our trousers' seams; but we got up,





as though accidentally and without looking at each other. We were Danes and our country lay half the world away.

As the last note died away Andersen said: "I'll just put another one on. It won't take a moment. We usually have it on."

It was Marius Jacobsen singing "Glad Jul." The record was old and worn, but all the same it had the power to bridge the Atlantic for a while, to destroy distance and take us home. Then from the other room we heard the muted sound of women's voices. Gradually it swelled, and when the record finished, the voices had imperceptibly taken up the weaving of the spell and they too were part of home.

The melody was not ours alone. It was a melody that belongs to the whole world at Christmas, and so, before we realized it, we two Danes were drawn from our isolation and reunited with the rest of the company. To the tune of "Glad Jul" though the words were those of *Noite de Paz Silencio e Luz*, Andersen walked round lighting the candles on a little Christmas tree whose branches were made of wire, its needles dark-green crêpe paper cut into a fringe and covered with cotton-wool and tinsel.



Under the tree were little parcels with presents for us all, and there were home-made sweets with marzipan and half walnuts. The gardener and the maids came in from the kitchen and were given their liberal share. The whole room was littered with paper and string, as it should be.

As I undid my presents I thought that after all it was a good thing that I wasn't lying in bed in the hotel reading my book. Then the bells began pealing from the

cathedral belfry and the women withdrew to go to midnight mass, so Andersen and I settled ourselves in arm-chairs, lit up, and as Christmas eve turned into Christmas day, he told me his story. Now Andersen's story is also part of Amazonas' history, so you shall hear it too.

After the peace of Ancon in 1884 had spoilt Bolivia's chances of gaining access to the Pacific and before Arica in Chile had become its transit port, Bolivia was in the unpleasant position of being isolated along with all its rubber. And in those days rubber was fetching the fantastic prices to which Amazonas owed the prosperity of which you will still find traces to-day. It is true that from the eastern part of the country access could be had to the Amazon and so to the Atlantic down the rivers Beni and Madeira; and this route was used. However, the distances involved were huge and there was the added disadvantage that there was a long stretch of fierce whirlpools and violent falls at the point where the united waters of the rivers Beni and Marmore flow into the Madeira, which made all transport well nigh impossible.

An attempt to connect these important rivers by a railway was made as early as 1874, but malaria and yellow fever were so fearful in those parts and the mortality among the workers so high that the French engineers had to give up the attempt, and the rubber continued to be transported in the old-fashioned way. Heavily-laden lighters were floated down the Beni and Marmore till they came to the beginning of the falls. There they were unloaded and the rubber carried by Indians round the fall, loaded into canoes, and paddled to the next fall. There it was unloaded again, carried by more Indians round that fall, and so on. There were twenty-eight falls that had to be negotiated in this way before the



rubber reached the navigable part of the Madeira river. Once there, it could be loaded into large lighters which were towed the long way to Belem and the Atlantic.

Countless accidents happened. The lighters that brought the rubber to the falls were large boats carrying from ten to fifteen tons and manœuvred by twelve oars and two long poles. Sometimes they were carried over the falls, and men and rubber lost in the whirlpools.

Andersen's mother-in-law came to San Antonio, the end of the canoe stage, in 1899 and married a Montenegren, de Negri, and there his wife was born. As far as Andersen knows she was the only child to be born there and to leave it alive.

Those were the days when at night the crocodiles crawled up among the stakes on which the houses were built and fed on the garbage, when the Indians killed all the inhabitants of a post by the falls merely because one of the men there had ill-treated one of their many dogs. (When the railway was finally finished, the Indians shot at the locomotives with arrows.) However, Mrs. de Negri took it all as it came.



The railway was built as a result of a deal Bolivia made with Brazil over the Acre territory in 1903. One of the conditions of the treaty was that the railway the French had abandoned was to be finished by American engineers and financed with Anglo-Belgian capital. And it was finished, though it took them seven years, from 1907 to 1914. It was undoubtedly the most expensive railway in the world to build.

They engaged five hundred German labourers. Only three came back. Then they employed Spaniards, Portuguese, and negroes from Barbados, and brought some of Gorgo's staff from the Panama marshes to dry the swamps

and spray every pool with petroleum so as to prevent the mosquitoes' larvæ from reaching full development, as had so successfully been done in Panama. Every door and window in every house was carefully shielded with mosquito netting, and everyone forced to take quinine every day. And the railway was completed.

It was 228 miles long and should have been longer, only by the time it was ready to take traffic interest in it had declined. The rubber boom had collapsed, prices were falling and falling, and it no longer paid Bolivia to transport raw rubber all that long way to the Atlantic, even though the falls had been overcome. The railway was condemned to death, even before it began to be used.

Andersen arrived there when it was almost complete, with only a few bridges remaining to be built. He was twenty-one. His father was a magistrate in a town in Denmark, where Andersen had attended the Polytechnic. And there he had met the traffic manager of the Madeira-Marmore Railway who was holidaying in Denmark, and whose wife knew Andersen's aunt. He had left home at two days' notice, and two months and six days later had gone ashore in Porto Velho, where he was to spend the next twenty years of his life.

To begin with, he was employed in an office working on statistics. That was not the adventurous life he had expected, but then adventure seldom comes to young men who dash off to queer places to experience the unbelievable. In the beginning they are engulfed in work, and when they do have time to look around them, they discover that what earlier they might have considered adventurous, has become commonplace. Andersen worked at his statistics for two months, and then he was moved to a station on the line called Abona, as assistant.



It wasn't a difficult job as there was only one train a day, and that didn't run at night because large trees were continually falling across the rails. The line ran through completely untouched jungle. The Indians were no longer troublesome. They had withdrawn deeper into the interior, as they always do from places to which civilization and unrest have come. They had given up the struggle. Sometimes, when the engine driver was down with fever, Andersen had to drive the engine himself. He always managed to keep it on the rails, and that was all that was needed, as there were no trains coming from the opposite direction, nor any ungarded level-crossings to look out for, his being the one and only train on the whole line.



In 1920 influenza came and their people were killed off as in the days of yellow fever. In 1922 a lieutenant and two soldiers appeared at Porto Velho and conquered it without having to strike a blow. That was how they learned that there was revolution in the rest of the country. Otherwise it was very quiet and peaceful there, if you except the weather, that part of the world being a centre of meteorological disturbance. They were seldom without a thunderstorm, and the lightning would often go right round the room as they sat playing cards. They found that a bit peculiar in the beginning, but they became accustomed to it.

When Andersen had been assistant at Abona for two months, he was made inspector, and he had to go from station to station seeing that the accounts were in order.

Before the first world war the wages were paid in Gold Coast dust, but when war broke out the management introduced sterling instead. The money was sent to them in large sacks. There was far too much to count, so

they just weighed the sacks. To begin with, the men refused to accept coin, of which they were most distrustful.

Andersen was inspector for a year and a half and then he was put in charge of the railway's own shop where the men could buy anything on earth at prices fixed by the company, and made head of the stores department. Then he spent six months in Belem in charge of the river transport that brought the raw rubber and other goods from Porto Velho to the sea. After that he returned to the jungle to take charge of the counting-house, and some time later was appointed assistant manager.

In 1931 the Madeira-Marmoré railway was wound up, and the Brazilian Government took over the remains. It had cost some seven million pounds to build, and the Brazilians got it all for a quarter of a million.

From Porto Velho Andersen went to Bolivia to liquidate the railway's sister company, a trading concern set up to ensure that the railway had sufficient goods to carry. That was at the time when Bolivia and Paraguay were busy fighting over Gran Chaco. He finished in 1934 and went to Belem.

Just now Andersen is mainly interested in machines capable of crushing para nuts—so far they have had to be cracked by hand—and in the manufacture of an insect poison obtained from the roots of the *timbo* plant. The Indians have known of timbo poison for centuries. They take a fresh root, pound it on the side of the canoe till the juice spreads over the water, and wait. In a few minutes fish begin reaching the surface belly upwards, dead. They can be taken in the hand and eaten without the least risk, for timbo poison only acts on cold-blooded creatures. That is what Andersen is experimenting with now.



One part of the poison to 25 million parts of water is strong enough to kill a fish. It also kills ants, lice, fleas, and other vermin, but it is elsewhere, in the world of medicine, that it is hoped timbo poison will prove of the greatest value. Timbo has already been shown to kill foot-fungi and to get rid of psora. During the war timbo was used by the Americans in jungle warfare and Andersen was kept busy supplying them.

We have a lot to learn of the Indians. So far no one has properly tried to get to the bottom of the medicine man's power over the tribes. They are certainly acquainted with properties of various plants of which we whites have no knowledge. However, here it is the same as with so many other things: Amazonas is such an inconceivably huge district, the distances are so tremendous and communications so primitive, that countless of its riddles will remain unsolved and its possibilities unexplored for many centuries yet.

And that is the true adventure of the Amazon, not the rustle of a boa in the undergrowth, nor the distant growl of a jaguar, which are the great things for those who traverse the Amazon country in a month, or even in a year.

Andersen has lived in Amazonas and Para for thirty-two years, and for him the latent possibilities are the only adventurous things about those parts.

A large bat came in through the open door, flapped round the room and disappeared out into the thick darkness again. It was late. The midnight mass was long since over and the others in the house had gone to bed. The thunder had rolled away across the jungle and brilliant stars came out. I packed up my presents and walked back to my hotel without meeting a soul.



Cicadas were fiddling away in all the big mango trees, filling the air with the rising and falling, rasping sound that newcomers find so strange and talk about, but which those who live on the spot never notice. Loud as was this cicada music, I was conscious all the time of a faint humming, of the tune of that old Christmas carol as Andersen's worn old record had played it, and I envisaged an endless succession of Christmases spent in the oppressive heat and the loneliness of the depths of the jungle, celebrated with a Christmas tree made of wire and crêpe-paper.

Thirty-two years among people who do not know your country and understand not one word of your own language! I understood then that Andersen had really meant it, when he had said that it would have ruined his Christmas if he had known that a Dane was spending Christmas eve alone in Belem.

That worn old gramophone record taught me more about fidelity than all the books in the world could ever do.



## CHAPTER VII

### *And So I Set Out*

LONG before Christmas I had been down to the SNAPP office to inquire about the possibilities of getting up the Amazon to Manaos.

The river steamers all used to be run by private companies, but now the State has taken them over to regularize the traffic, which is now all in the hands of SNAPP. It is easy to guess what the result has been.

The people engaged in running the boats are no longer personally interested in whether they show a profit or not, nor even in whether the time table can be kept. Naturally, it is a good thing if it can, but if not, nothing happens. Nobody gets paid any more if he takes a pride in keeping his boat clean and tidy. All that he gets is just the extra work. Now that there is no more competition between the various lines, it is really a matter of indifference whether or not the passengers are given decent food, or whether there is ventilation in the cabins. If a passenger gets on his high horse and says that he will go on another boat next time, his money still goes to the same place.

I was one of a longish queue waiting for audience with the somnolent young man sitting at the desk. Then my turn came.

"You want to go to Manaos?" queried the young man, looking at my pass. "What on earth do you want to do that for? Anyway, you can't. Your passport is invalid.



You haven't reported your arrival in Belem. I must ask you to go at once to the Police Station and put that in order. After that you can always come back again."

At the Police Station it appeared that my failure to report was a very serious matter. All matters are very serious until your fingers begin to stray towards the pocket in which your pocket-book sits. The police only receive about £5 a month in wages. The rest they have to find for themselves. This time, however, it was really serious. Not only had I not reported my arrival in Belem, but my passport had not been properly stamped when I first came to the country, and I had not paid the entry dues. These amounted to sixty cruzeiros. Then there was a fine of fifty cruzeiros to pay. I had myself to go to the custom-house, buy stamps for 110 cruzeiros and take them back.

The first day I was given the wrong stamps, and when I went back the office was shut. The following day I got the right ones and returned in triumph to the Police Station, where a different man dealt with me. He disappeared for a long time into another office, and when he came back to the counter, it was to tell me that as I hadn't been six months in the country, I didn't need to pay a fine. Sixty cruzeiros for the entry dues would be enough. Putting the fifty cruzeiro stamps in my pocket-book—where they still are as no one would refund my money—I saw that the stamps for the dues were stuck into my passport and stamped and written over, then I asked:

"Is all in order now? Can I now go to Manaos?"

"All in order," answered the man behind the counter.

When I left Brazil I discovered that it wasn't quite all in order. The Harbour Police asked in amazement why



on earth I had had so many stamps stuck into my passport, as entry dues had been abolished for holders of tourist visas many months before. This news had evidently not reached the Amazon.

Having had my passport stamped, I joined another queue and eventually came to a man who inoculated people against yellow fever at the rate of fifty injections an hour. A certificate that you had been inoculated was required before you were allowed to sail up the river. Once in possession of this, I again joined the queue at the somnolent young man's desk in the SNAPP offices.

"Good God, are you still here," he said, looking disapprovingly at me. "Well, I may as well give you a ticket. There are no berths available," he added long before I had told him on what day, month, or even in what year, I intended to travel.

"All right, all right," said I, for I had already been told that after the best berths had been allotted to government officials, members of government officials' families, and to friends of government officials and their families, the list of those still vacant was handed to the steward on board an hour before the boat sailed, and you had to fight for them with cruzeiro notes as your weapon.



It is a good job being a steward on the largest and quickest of the boats. They reach Manaus in eight days, if all goes well. The slowest are a month covering the same distance.

You won't find any fashionable people on the Manaus boats. The really fashionable ones never go to the Amazon. Rio is enough for them. The nearly fashionable fly. The 'plane only takes eight hours. The first-class is full of good, plain middle-class passengers, the

third of the poverty-stricken. But then the fare is very cheap.

I received one of the usual steamer tickets, the back of which is covered with closely printed paragraphs which relieve the shipping company of all responsibility and put it all fairly and squarely on the wretched passenger. Thus the company is not liable to pay me or my heirs any compensation whatever should (a) the boat be diverted to any other port in the world, (b) the boat be lost with all and everything on board; (c) the crew throw my luggage overboard in a fit of frolicsomeness; (d) the captain borrow my shaving-machine; (e) the mate fall in love with my wife; (f) the cook plunge a skewer into me, or (g) should I die of food-poisoning, break my neck by being tripped up by a cabin boy, or be marooned on a desert island.

And so it goes on. When the alphabet is exhausted, they start on figures. No one has ever been able to read all the paragraphs, because, before you are half-way through, the boat has arrived—if it ever does.

On the other hand, what the company demands of its passenger is always easy to grasp and praiseworthily concise. It is set out in a notice displayed in the cabin, and in the imperative mood. Should you write your name on the peeling walls, remove anything belonging to the company from its original place, be half a minute late for boat-drill, make a noise after 11 o'clock at night, or contradict the captain, you are to be hanged from the yard-arm, if there is one, and the company reserves the right to claim compensation from your heirs.

But all that was agreed on at an international congress in Aakirkeby in 1878, so you are in no doubt as to what you are letting yourself in for.

The first time you look at the rules on the back of



your ticket, you feel that the captain and crew must experience a malicious pleasure as they watch you coming up the gangway, like that of a housewife when she sees a mouse making for the trap in the larder. This feeling gradually becomes blunted, but you never escape the impression of being one of the dregs of society, a poor hunted wretch of an outlaw, the moment you write your name on the dotted line.

The somnolent young man looked listlessly at me while I signed. Then I paid and went out back into the sunshine.

On the pavement outside I ran into a young American whom I had met a few evenings previously. He had come to Belem to sell tractors and bulldozers.

"Well, did you get your ticket?" he asked sympathetically. He himself had just returned from Manaus and had done his best to persuade me against going by riverboat. He himself had flown there, but you had to wait about two months for a seat on a 'plane.

I waved the ticket under his nose.

"I don't understand how you can be bothered. In fact, I don't understand you travel-writers at all. You make it all so difficult for yourselves. Why do you always write about things that no one cares a button about. You fill pages and pages with descriptions of internal conditions and foreign policy, write screeds about a country's commerce, geography and ethnography. You run with your tongue hanging out from one ministry to another, crawl on your belly before statesmen, and read your eyes out in libraries, all to amass a lot of dull figures about imports and exports. And all that leaves you no time to find out how the ordinary people live and amuse themselves

"Have you seen any sport here? I don't mean long expeditions into the jungle to shoot big game, of which there is none in South America; nor do I mean dangling a fourpenny fly from a £25 rod in front of the nose of some wretched trout. I mean real popular sport. Have you seen a football match here?"

I was beginning to get a little annoyed. We knew each other quite well, but all the same I have been travelling and writing most of my life, and I ought to know better than he what people want to read about.

"Football!" said I. "You can't write about that. The people who read my books can see it almost every Saturday of their lives. They have the same rules here and wear the same clothes. I can't waste an hour and a half on that."

"You try it all the same. The rules may be the same, but then Paderewski and my little sister play the same notes, but the result is not the same by any means."

That evening we drove out to Belem's big outdoor stadium, where the local Tuna team and Rio's famous Fluminense team were due to meet at nine o'clock by artificial light. It was crammed full. The opportunity of seeing the Fluminense eleven in Belem was an event that had attracted everybody.

The advertisements had announced that a whole new set of extra floodlights were to be used for the occasion, but by 9.15 none had yet been switched on. Tickets were being sold on the street by the light of two fluttering tallow-candles. It had been pouring all day and the unmetalled road was a shallow lake of red mud that reached to your ankles.

A man stood by the entrance gate inspecting our tickets with a candle in his hand. People were pouring in.





By 9.30 we had found our seats. They were in the first row, wonderful seats, and we sat there with our noses poking over the rail. We ought to get a wonderful view from where we were, and there was every chance of getting a ball or a player on our heads as well. And if the excitement should spread to the big covered grandstands just behind us and people began throwing bottles, oranges or shoes at the referee's head, we should be well placed for that too. And, of course, if the spectators should take it into their heads to storm the pitch and lynch the referee, we would be just at the right spot for that. It was like sitting with your back to an avalanche.

"Bull-fighting isn't allowed in Brazil," said my American friend. "So the Brazilians go to football matches instead. It is very much the same thing; only here there are only matadors in the arena, while the bulls sit on benches on the other side of the fence."

We could hear their angry bellowing behind us. It was already three-quarters of an hour past the advertised time, and although the Brazilian is not accustomed to punctuality, yet he can grow impatient.

People were still pouring in. The candles were like will o' the wisps dancing in the darkness round the entrance. The roar was mounting. Then the new lighting arrangements were switched on and blinding white light gushed over the pitch from all sides, giving the grass the garish green hue of the artificial grass used in window-dressing. This must have been better than the old lighting, for a shiver of delight swept through the stand, and nothing else was talked of for the next quarter of an hour.

Now we could see what was happening. Ordinary daylight was twilight compared with this cold, white light.

Yes—everybody was here. Consul J. V. Figueiredo de Campos was sitting beside the Ford dealer, Luigi Canteloupe de Souza; and there was that wonderful doctor from Santa Casa de Misericordia, Don Paulo. The stand and the cheaper places were packed with anonymous citizens of all ages, but the one sex. There were no women there. The mango trees round the pitch were heavily laden with the local kids, and every now and again there would be a crack like a gunshot, as a branch broke.

"Ices, soda water, chocolate, cigarettes, cigars. . . ."

Rockets shot up from the long side. Squibs hissed and spluttered across the grass. There always are fireworks when Brazil makes holiday.

Then the doors were opened and in stormed the twenty-two players followed by a minor host of officials, trainers, doctors and masseurs who spread themselves round the pitch. The photographers' flashlights blazed; a pure white ball was thrown on to the pitch, the two teams lined up, and the spectators cheered and roared and let off pistols.

All round the pitch were policemen, their chinstraps drawn tight under their blue shaven chins, watching all that happened.

"What on earth are all the police doing here?" I asked my American.

"They may well be needed," he answered.

That was not a very satisfactory answer. I could see that several kinds of police were there: the special police in their red caps, who are employed when there are political riots or on similar ticklish jobs. They are a tough lot and hit before they ask questions. There were the ordinary police in khaki uniforms, military police





from the Army, Navy and Air Force in their respective uniforms equipped with white gaiters, armlets, revolvers and murderous-looking bludgeons. And last of all there was a group of light mounted police on restless horses that danced nervously in the strong light.



Then the referee's whistle shrilled.

It is twenty-five years since I last played football, so I am not sure that I can give a satisfactory account of the struggle. Anyway it began by one of those in the front row giving the ball a little kick. Then someone else gave it a kick forward, after which a third player in a different coloured jersey kicked it back again. But, perhaps, it would be boring to describe the whole game in such detail?

Nothing particular happened during the first half. To everybody's surprise the local team was doing pretty well; but, as my companion said, Fluminense were to play another match the next evening for which they would be better paid.

Tuna set a furious pace, but Fluminense never let them through. That naturally made them very annoyed with the Rio team. Most of the play was in the Tuna half, and after five minutes the betting already stood at 5-1. The referee made some stupid decisions that wasted a lot of time, as when he stopped the entire game and gave Tuna a free kick just because Fluminense's right-back had seized Tuna's left-half round the waist, lifted him up and flung him away. The spectators protested furiously at the referee interfering like that in what had looked really promising.

Tuna were too slow on the ball and their passing inaccurate. Fluminense were too much inclined to play to the gallery and too fond of solo turns. Thanks to

Tuna's goal-keeper the score was still 0-0 when, twenty minutes after play began, the lights went out all over the pitch. That gave both sides a chance to rest while new fuses were put in.

Apart from several clever trips and a few good attempts at Tuna's goal, nothing else of note happened during the first half. All the same, both teams had had to call upon two of their reserves.

"This is going to be a *very* interesting chapter in my book about the Amazon," said I, and looked at my companion as disdainfully as one can when drinking Coca-cola out of the bottle. "They will be *tremendously* interested at home to read about Tuna's offensive tactics."

The American sat there looking rather crestfallen.

"This is not the usual sort of game," he said. "Naturally, you *can* be unlucky."

I didn't deign to reply, for I realized that I had wasted an evening I could have put to much better use.

The second half began.

Tuna still managed to keep the ball out of their goal, despite the fact that everyone except the Rio goal-keeper were now permanently clustered in the Tuna half. When there was only ten minutes to go the Fluminense centre-forward took the ball from a fine pass from his right-wing, got it under control, and was just lifting his leg to send it into the Tuna goal that at that moment was empty, when he was attacked from behind by the Tuna right-back, who stuck one leg in front of him and gave him a violent thrust in the back with his two clenched fists. The Fluminense centre-forward muffed his kick, the Tuna goal-keeper got back into goal and fisted the ball for a corner.





In the fight that followed both centre-forward and right-back fell to the ground one on top of the other, where they lay face to face. This being an advantageous position for such a manoeuvre, they immediately started kicking each other's shins. The spectators howled with joy: hats were thrown into the air, and more fireworks were let off than ever before.

Meanwhile the other twenty players were hastening up along with the trainers, officials, masseurs and doctors of either side. In a matter of seconds the ground in front of the Tuna goal was covered by a seething, howling cluster of about thirty men each of whom hit, scratched, bit and kicked whomever happened to be lying underneath him.

The referee's piercing whistle which was trying to draw their attention to the fact that there ought to be a free kick, was suddenly reinforced by the warblings of police whistles. The spectators in the cheaper parts were already beginning to clamber over the rails making for the pitch, and there was a sound coming from the stand as though the avalanche was beginning to move. The ground shook with the tread of eager feet just coming down the steps. We in the first row bent our backs and braced hands and feet against the rails.

At this moment the gates from the street were opened and a company of soldiers marched in, formed fours, and moving at the double stationed themselves all round the pitch as though to emphasize that what was happening there was a private entertainment not included in the price the spectators had paid for their tickets. Policemen with drawn cudgels came running from all sides towards the scene of the fight. Mounted policemen galloped up and down and across on foaming horses, shouting and

calling, while the others began sorting the heap in front of the goal into two smaller ones, according to the colour of the jerseys. Each heap was then surrounded by a police cordon, and at last the referee was allowed to blow his whistle alone and announce that there was to be a free kick.

The spectators growled.

Inside the two police cordons, the two teams ran round tearing their hair, throwing themselves on to the ground, flaying the grass and emitting inarticulate noises. Three of them were sobbing.

An elderly man was whacking me on the head hard and continually with his umbrella from behind. I let him, for it is impossible to have a row through an interpreter.

A young man was thrown over the rail in the stand and passed from hand to hand down the rows till he reached the gates and then he was chucked out into the street. No one knew what he had done, but he had certainly done something.

Gradually things quietened down, and then the referee in consultation with the police commander, gave the captains of the two teams ten minutes in which to decide whether or not they wished to continue the game. The Fluminense team cast bloodthirsty looks at their opponents and immediately announced their willingness to continue. Tuna, however, wished to take advantage of the full ten minutes. When the time was up they refused to go on playing, so Fluminense were pronounced the winners.\* The police arrested the local eleven and drove them away in a Black Maria.

"What will happen to them?" I asked my American, as





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"What will happen to them?" I asked my American, as

we fought our way towards the exit, making ruthless use of our height and broad shoulders.

"Normally they would spend the night in clink and be released in the morning after paying a fine for causing a street riot. If it had happened in the first half the police would have seized the money in the box-office and refunded the price of their tickets to all who applied at the police station. Perhaps Tuna will be put in quarantine for a while."

"So you do have rules for this sort of incident?"

"Oh, yes. And they often have to be put into effect."

"Well, if you don't mind me saying so, the rules here are not exactly the same as we have at home."

After that we went to the Para Club, which was seething with members who had been to see the game.

If you should think this account of the match between Tuna and Fluminense in any way exaggerated, you can send for a copy of *Folha del Norte* for 12th January, 1946. In it you will find a more detailed and professional description of the game.

\*

If you had nothing else to do and could stand on the boat deck and watch the river boat's departure from Belem, you would find that it was like looking down on the bright colours and gaiety of a Russian market.

Porters lugged heavy trunks and packing cases, sweating men struggled with barrels and bales, women sauntered up with huge bundles on their heads and infants balanced on their hips, protesting mules were dragged backside first up the gangway and shoved into wooden partitions under the awning.

On the quarter deck little naked black boys were running about among the legs of the grown-ups, who were



busily hanging up gaily-coloured hammocks wherever there was room to tie a rope.

Mothers unbuttoned and presented heavy black breasts to their infants, while a melancholy youth turned his back on all the commotion and played sad tunes on a guitar with his long legs dangling in the water.

The quay was a painter's palette of bright colours: flowered dresses, red kerchiefs, blue and yellow belts—and over it all waved the regular black circles of umbrellas.

An umbrella is part of the normal equipment of all who live in Amazonas and Para. One moment it is raining torrents from black clouds, the next the sun is so hot as to melt the asphalt. An umbrella is needed for shade or shelter the whole time, and it is seldom taken down.

More and more cars drove slowly up the quay, their horns blowing; more and more people came pouring up the gangway. There were fifty bunks in the boat, and at least three hundred people had come aboard. Who cares about a bunk, when you carry a hammock with you?

I had no need to worry about hanging up my hammock. I had gone down to see the steward the moment I came aboard and had shown him the corner of a 50 cruzeiro note. He had nodded and told me that, although he wouldn't have any proper bunks until we had passed Santarem, I didn't need to worry: he would find me somewhere to sleep till then, if I would just put up with that. Thus, I could stand up on the boat deck and watch the scene with an easy mind.

Some passengers had hung bird cages up on the quarter-deck. An old man was pouring water into an orna-





mental water-cooler of reddish earthenware painted with a design that was obviously taken from the ancient vessels of the Marajo Indians. Those designs and ornaments are all that remains of that people, the only Indian tribe in Brazil ever to develop an art of its own. Now these designs are daubed on cheap earthen pots and vessels that are sold in the markets for a shilling each.

The siren emitted a fierce wail to warn all to get off the boat unless they wished to go with us. That was the signal for an orgy of embracing and clapping of backs; people sobbed; young girls with blue-black hair clung to young men who gently tried to loose their grasp about their shoulders; children screamed; parrots shrieked behind their bars, and in all that uproar one small black bird with yellow spots sat on its perch in its cage singing as sweetly as any nightingale.

The ropes were hauled in. A turgid strip of the Amazon appeared between ship and quay, growing wider and wider. A young girl on the quay fainted; another on the deck beneath me was sobbing heart-rendingly.

I turned to a young lieutenant:

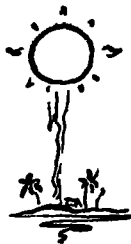
"Where are all these people going?" I asked.

"*Seringueiros!*" he replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Rubber collectors," I repeated, and the smile with which I had watched those farewells left my face. Rubber collectors! Now I understood why all the tragedy and tears.

Death was travelling with us, third-class.

There had again been a fearful drought in the coastal districts south of the mouth of the Amazon. The sun had scorched up all the crops on the eastern hump of the Continent. There had been famine in Ceara and



thousands of small farmers had been ruined. Day and night for months the air had been like the blast from a furnace. Everything in their fields had withered up and their cattle had died of thirst. They had been left with no choice but to starve to death, or to go to the rubber districts, which were now moving deeper and deeper into the jungle, as the rubber trees were destroyed by wasteful methods.

These poor wretches were going to be put ashore far up the Rio Negro and Rio Branco along with all their worldly goods which lay packed in those poor little bundles and small, handleless baskets. They were staking the only thing of value they had left, their lives, in a throw with death, and they had no illusions about the odds. Too many from their parts had gone there before, and stayed for ever. And the few who had come back had not been of much use.

What a good thing that motor tyres cannot speak.

However, it was only the young people who had reacted so violently when the boat left the quay. The older men sat on the hatch with eyes gazing out across the river they did not see. They were small thin men with the cheekbones of Indians. Once their forefathers had come down to the coast from the jungle and there taken to clothes. Now the wheel had turned full circle and they themselves were on their way back to the jungle.

These men to whom life had really never given a chance now began settling themselves in. Their hammocks hung so close together that they touched, even when empty. Some were sprinkling white farofa into tins, cooking rice and stuffing it into their mouths with their black fingers; others were queueing to draw rice and



beans from the galley. One complete family squatted round an old, dented enamel chamber-pot from which they ate greedily.

Up above, in the privileged first-class, a gong sounded and lunch was served. I intended to take my time, have a look round the boat, and perhaps, go to the second service. You see, I wasn't so keen about taking my meals. Those of my acquaintances in Belem who had never been to Manaos, or who had flown there, if they had ever had to go those thousand miles up the Amazon, had told me that the river-boats were pure plague spots. Most of the cooks, they assured me, were typhus-carriers. If they washed the dishes at all, it was in river water. I was on no account to drink water on board, always beer or soda water, and only what was made by one of the big concerns. I was to order an apollinaris every morning for washing my teeth.



Perhaps, it would be best to do without meals altogether during the trip, I thought. I could probably forage in the towns where we put in, and just forget about meals being included in the price of the ticket. It would be appalling to reach Manaoas in the throes of dysentery.

Meanwhile, I went into the bar and ordered a drink.

"House of Lords, *por favor*—with an 'Antartica' Apollinaris!"

What I got was a beer, the product of a small local brewery.

After that I had a look round and discovered that this was no ordinary bar. It reminded me of nothing so much as of the one and only shop in a country village. Later in the trip I saw that it did in fact function like one. Every time we laid up alongside a rickety wharf in a little riverside town, half the inhabitants would pour



The skin of that grint snake, the Ancondi



A great Ant-Eater carries its young on its back



aboard and supply themselves with their needs from the bartender. There were few things they couldn't buy from him.

While the others were eating I made a list of the articles displayed on the counter and shelves. There were tins of jams, children's books, sex books, books about big business, chocolate, biscuits, cigarettes, combs, string, framed religious pictures, calendars with literary quotations, calendars with pin-up girls, old newspapers, a pair of rubber-soled shoes, boxes of sweets, peanuts, raisins packed in cellophane, playing cards, silk stockings, cigarette lighters, and one lady's handbag of white calf with black patches. There were unopened packing cases in every corner. And then there was beer, soda water and the local gin, *cachas*, which can be used as a beverage, purgative or motor car fuel, just according to your needs.

I bought a packet of raisins, two slabs of chocolate and a detective novel, and made myself comfortable in a deck-chair, quite determined to forage for my own food during the next eight days.

When I reckoned that both first and second sittings were over, so that there would be no immediate danger in venturing down there, I went to the saloon to find out from the steward where he was intending to put me.

"Ah, dear *amigo*," he said when he saw me. "I've been looking for you all over the boat. Now, everybody has already eaten—the gong means that a meal is to be served—but may I be allowed to ask you to take pot luck with us at our table—we're just going to have something."

With a sweeping gesture he pointed to a table at which the personnel of the saloon and kitchen were already seated.



I am an idiot about such things: I just can't say "no" to people when they are being nice to me. I can never invent an excuse quick enough. Anyway, I had no desire to offend the kind creature, nor to be branded as an arrogant foreigner, perhaps even an American, one who refused to sit at table with the four negroes I saw looking up at me from the benches round the table, smiling hospitably.



There sat the waiter, there the carver, and there the cook: the typhus-carriers and their helpers who washed the dishes in river water, if at all. By not going down to lunch I had merely jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

Have you ever been so near death that you cease to care and just let things happen? If not, then you will not be able to understand my feelings as I sat down on the right of the steward where a place had been hurriedly laid. Then, before I could stop him, the steward poured me out a glass of water from a carafe. When you are a guest and see all the others drinking water from the same carafe you can't make yourself conspicuous by ordering beer.

The cloth was fly-blown. The dishes had obviously been used before—several times. There was lipstick on the glass. The meat tasted like a dishcloth, and the rice was full of tiny stones. Even the pimento sauce that is usually able to make the most insipid dish taste like hell fire, had no strength. Luckily, I realized that there were three hundred others in the same boat and eating the same food. Why should I consider myself above them and refuse to share their lot?

"Cheerio, amigo," said I, and drank off the glass in three or four gulps.

"Cheerio, amigo," replied the steward grinning, and refilled the empty glass to the rim.

Four million assorted bacilli were hurtling down into my inside. Nothing could stop them.

My employers couldn't in all decency give my wife less than three months' salary. Were I to come through this alive, I thought, I won't go so far as to build a church, but I will be considerably less sceptical about the theory of miracles than I used to be.

"Where am I going to sleep?" I asked the steward, when we had drunk the worst coffee I had yet tasted in Brazil.

"Just follow me," said the steward and walked out of the saloon, along a narrow corridor, down an iron stairway, across a between-deck, and in through a narrow door.

"I shall have to put you in here until we've left Santarem," said he, and I realized that fifty cruzeiros had not been enough. Someone more familiar with the trip had given him more.

"This is lovely," said I, and the little angel that sits on my left shoulder wept, while the black angel on my right shoulder scribbled in the book in which he carefully notes my every lie and false enthusiasm.

This was the forecastle for the personnel of the galley. There were eight iron bunks in two tiers. The only ventilation was a narrow chink under the ceiling.

"Choose for yourself," said the steward, clapping me on the shoulder. I chose the upper bunk just under the chink. I would at least be able to lie with open mouth and nose against it.

The sheets weren't changed.

When I went to bed that night my fellows were already





asleep. A giant coal-black negro was snoring thunderously in the bunk below me. In the other bunks lay various mixtures of white, black and Indian tossing uneasily in the heat. To reach my bunk I had to crawl over a man lying on the floor with a pair of shoes for a pillow. He grunted as I stepped over him and gave me a hurt look. The connexion was obvious: the steward had given him five cruzeiros to give up his bunk for two nights. That gave the steward a net profit of forty-five cruzeiros.

I went to bed and slept like a log, while M.S. *Virginia* with quivering motors thudding, breasted the fierce current of the largest river in the world.



## CHAPTER VIII

### *Up River*

It is my honest conviction that Brazil is wise not to advertise the trip up the Amazon as an international tourist attraction on a par with the Norwegian fjords. There is no doubt that a few mendacious brochures with attractive titles like "Sailing among the wild beasts of the jungle," "By steamer into the Green Hell," &c., would draw a lot of people, especially as with the Amazon there is much more justification than with Naples, to say: See it and die!

If you can take the *M.S. Virginia*, the crack ship of the Amazon fleet, as an example of the passenger service, then it will be some time yet before Lady Ever-so-much and Lord Tittletattle sink into their deck chairs after tea and say, with a little sigh of satisfaction: "It's good to be here!" I am pretty sure that there are quite a lot of things they would miss.

The toilet and bath arrangements, for one thing, are not quite what you see advertised in American magazines. How they manage in the third-class, I don't know, but the first-class has one w.c. and adjoining shower-bath for the male passengers. As there were seventy-five of us, it will be realized that we had to queue for our morning bath. And I just daren't think what would have happened if an epidemic of cholera had broken out on board. As it was, some of the passengers did not seem to realize the purpose of that white porcelain pan.



To give any further description would be to plunge into the indelicate. Suffice it to say that after my first visit I went down to my cabin, extracted a bottle of binding mixture from my suitcase, took a large dose, and that was that.

The shower-bath, I decided, would have to wait till we reached Manaus. Despite the intolerable heat that was not a difficult decision to make once I had seen that the water that came out of the shower was thick, greenish-brown river water.



This settled, I went up on deck, installed myself in an armchair, and began reading Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*. There were tears of self-pity in my eyes when I came to the passage:

—Alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on the wide, wide sea.  
Alone, and not a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

Round about me people were settling themselves in. Some had thirty days in that boat ahead of them. An amazing thought when you remember that in thirty days the P. & O. will take you from England to Australia, and that you can go from Gothenburg or Copenhagen to Buenos Aires in eighteen. And the Amazon is merely a river in South America.

I woke at six, having slept wonderfully. My companions had long since got up and disappeared to their work.

On the promenade deck the passengers were beginning to crawl out of their hammocks. The mother-of-pearl colouring of dawn still lay over the river and in the sky. The male passengers were walking about in pyjamas scratching their hair, clawing at their bellies, and yawn-

ing their heads off. The women were slopping about in down at heel slippers, the curlers in their hair like a swarm of butterflies. The children were beginning to bawl.

The air felt relatively fresh, and no wonder, for the thermometer on the bridge had fallen right down to 89 deg. Fahrenheit. That really does feel cool when the normal day temperature lies between 97 deg. and 101 deg. This was January, one of the hottest months. It has occasionally happened in July that the temperature has fallen as far as 64 deg., but then people say they are freezing and the women get out their fur coats.

What makes the heat so intolerable at times is the large amount of moisture in the air. In a dry atmosphere 101 deg. is not so bad, but when the air has a relative dampness of 78 per cent., as is the case here, such a temperature gets on your nerves.

However, this was the morning, and it was cool. You could look about you with relatively lively senses.

Land was not very far away. During the night we had left the southern arm of the Amazon, officially called Rio Para, and sailed in among the confusion of smaller and larger islands lying in the lee of Marajo. The northern arm is seldom used by shipping. It is too dangerous and not very well charted.

This collection of islands lies between Marajo and the mainland. For more than seventy miles we cruised in and out of narrow channels. It was like being in a green labyrinth.

"Get up early in the morning and keep a good look out," the Captain had advised me, before I went to bed. "To-morrow we shall be passing the only stretch on the whole trip, where there is anything to see."



That was rather a damping thing to say to one who had come to the Amazon, drawn by the glitter of the romance and adventure that surrounds the river's very name.

In this narrow strait it is not much more than sixty yards from shore to shore. The jungle comes right down to the water, so that you have plenty of opportunity of studying its tangle of trunks, its endless variations on the colour green, which is only occasionally relieved by the splash of a flower or the brilliant colours of a bird, and its fringe of white herons standing on one leg in the water.



The white heron with its fine, lace-like tail-feathers is far more the bird of the Amazon than the parrot which is always chosen to symbolize that river. You hardly ever see a parrot except in the morning and evening when they fly over the river in pairs cackling and screeching on their way to or from the places where they work, that is the trees where they greedily munch ripe fruit. The toucan, or pepper-bird, hides in the tree tops and you will be lucky to see it in flight. The only sign of life it gives is when it emits its long drawn-out deep note at a certain definite time in the afternoon. The white heron, however, stands at his fishing-ground, freely visible from far away as a shining speck in all that green, and only takes flight when you are quite close. Then it slips silently away with heavy, dignified beats of its wings.

Yet the loveliest sight of all is when towards sunset, the white herons all make for the same tree. They come gliding in from every side and settle in its top, until the whole tree appears covered with new-fallen snow blushing in the last rays of the sun. If nothing else happened on the Amazon trip, that sight alone would be something to remember all your life.



The Indian takes his pets with him on long trips



Rays are shot with bow and arrow



But other things do happen.

Here and there in clearings carved out of the thick undergrowth of the bank stands a dilapidated hut of bamboo and palm leaves. These are the homes of the *seringueiros*, the rubber collectors of the jungle. They are there all the way up to Manaus, a thousand miles; and all the way from there to Iquitos, another thousand miles; and they are along every tributary of the Amazon large and small, including those you will not find on any map.



From these huts the rubber collectors make trips of many miles into the jungle every day, to return to their wives and their eternal diet of beans that cook over a fire the smoke from which escapes through the roof. That smoke drifts out over the river, adheres to its calm, metallic surface and lies there like a veil.

Small narrow canoes manned by children and young girls kept shooting out from either bank. It was as though the boat were a magnet drawing them to it. At first, going on experience gained elsewhere, I thought that they were coming to beg. Then I changed my mind and supposed they had just come out to wave to us. Neither was correct.

When the canoes were within a yard or two of our bows the children in them dropped their paddles and righted themselves on the narrow thwart. They had come to bob up and down in the wave. They had narrow, transparent yellow faces crowned by jet black hair cut straight above the eyebrows, and they sat there bobbing up and down in the wake without so much as a smile, without even changing expression. They paid no attention to our shouts or waving hands. They just sat there enjoying their see-saw until the waves had passed on



towards land and died away. Then they picked up their paddles again and returned to the bank.

All the time we were passing through these narrow channels we saw them putting out into the middle ahead of us, and making back to the shore when we had passed.

Small children, yet so deadly serious about their see-saw.

Other small, over-dressed, spoilt children of three or four with lipstick on their mouths and varnish on their nails, stood on the first-class boat-deck pointing at them.

There was perspective in that picture. There could have been no better illustration of life on the river.

That see-saw in its wake each time a steamer passes on its way from town to town is at the same time cinema, theatre, dance, wireless, restaurant, fun-fair, holiday and toys to those pallid children with narrow mouths. And it will remain so until they reach the age when they are too old, too worn and too racked by disease to be able to amuse themselves with a thing so slight. When that happens, they do not have many pleasures left.

None of them can read or write. They live perhaps 150 miles from the nearest school. Their food is as poor and wretched as it can be. They have yet to learn of vitamins and calories. Here, in this country where a branch will send out roots and bear fruit if it is merely stuck up in the fat clay soil of the river bank, where nature is so prolific that countless fruits shower down from thousands of trees in every square mile, here the people live on rice and beans, beans and rice, day in, day out. Perhaps, occasionally there will be a scrap of meat in the water in which the rice is cooked, or a chicken, or a fish from the river, but beans and rice, and



a handful or two of manioc flour sprinkled into the pot, are the main component of their meals from the cradle till their all too early death.

The jungle grows right up to their houses. Just a few strokes with a machete and a little scratching of the ground to keep down the worst weeds, and they would be able to have the bananas, pineapples, oranges, lemons—all the healthy, juicy fruits of the tropics, to provide that addition to their diet which it so badly lacks. But no one has told them that, or shown them how.

When a child dies, they are content to lay the blame at fever's door; yet many children die of faulty feeding. Eighty per cent. of the children born tubercular have to die.

Now and again we drew so close to the bank that the sweet, musky breath of the jungle with its troubling smell of decay, swept like a warm gust across the deck where mothers sat in deck chairs painting little girls' nails with fresh varnish. Some young lieutenants going for a tour of duty in one or other of the jungle forts were explaining to some small inquisitive girls a little of what they were looking at. It was difficult to believe they were speaking of women and children. They discussed them as though they were an interesting species of monkey, and did not seem to have the least sense of affinity with them. Yet, they were their fellow countrymen, Brazilians the same as they.

Distances in this country are inconceivably large—and not only in miles.

There was no one who could tell me anything about a single thing of all that we were passing. None of those to whom I spoke knew the name of even the most striking trees. In their eyes the jungle was just a piece of proud

flesh filling in the space between the two large towns of the Amazon basin. The Amazon is still just a place in which to earn money in the shortest possible time, so as to get away, away to the rich, gay cities in the south.

Towards evening we glided out of the confusion of islands and narrow channels and on to the broad river at the point where it divides into two arms and makes its way to the Atlantic on either side of Marajo. So, according to the Captain, that was the end. There would be nothing else to see. And he ought to have known, for he has been on that run for years. But perhaps it wouldn't be quite as bad as he had made out.



As the sun was setting we came close in under the shore. The opposite bank was six or seven miles away, right under the horizon. From the jungle came the sound of the howling monkeys' evening song, rising and falling, a rumbling, provocative sound, as though the jungle had found a voice of its own.

The sun went down into the river straight ahead of us, glowing redly through the damp-sodden air. Some belated parrots flapped past on their way to the opposite bank, flying with short, nervous beats of their wings. Below deck guitars were strumming and nimble fingers drumming hectic rhythms on the tins and oil-drums of the cargo. The third-class was dancing the samba.

The last glow of the smouldering sunset was quenched in some distant part of the river. The howling monkeys fell silent. It was night.



I was standing in the bows, my back turned on the jabbering company that had taken possession of the

rickety deck-chairs behind the winch. A full moon was beginning to rise astern.

We were going along a few hundred yards from the one bank. The other was so far away that it could scarcely be guessed at. The silver-grey trunks of some trees shone spectrally in the moonlight. Then I had one of my lyrical moments.

What couldn't I have written, what atmosphere couldn't I have created, had I been sitting there in my white tent, alone in the jungle, except, perhaps, for a faithful native crouching at my feet, and seen this ship come past blazing with lights like a dream picture! How much easier everything would have been, if I could have got off at the next stopping-place and let the boat sail on towards Manaus with its load of shrill-voiced, empty-headed, jabbering people who talked of nothing but politics, fashions, scandal, and such like everyday things, while the boat sailed up the mightiest river in the world with all that its name implies.

I could have left the boat and gone into the jungle. There I could have given my imagination full rein: let it make the most of every little rustle, turn the slightest malaise into an attack of yellow fever. There would be no one to give me away.

I could have chosen that way out, but then I should have let down not only my readers, but all the people over there whom I had learned to respect. I could not turn their fine, clean cities into stinking fever-spots merely in order to write a book that would be an imitation of hundreds of other books of fairy-tales, instead of an account of what I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears.

Well, I should have to renounce the interest and



romance of life in the jungle and try to endure the fatigues of civilized life in this accursed country.

The sweat was running down my back. Four hours after sunset the thermometer still stood at 97 deg., yet all the men were wearing tie, collar, and jacket, so naturally I, the guest of their country, had to do the same.

From somewhere in the jungle came a hollow, long drawn-out roar. The woman sitting nearest to me gave a start. I turned and saw that she was the no longer young clerk from Belem who was being moved to another branch in Manaos. She was high-strung and imaginative, had large dark eyes, a wart with a hair in it on her chin, and hands that gesticulated expressively. She was born in Belem, and this was her first trip of any length.

"Oh!" said she theatrically, and clapped her small hands together delightedly. "A jaguar!"

"Um onca!—um onca!" The word was, tossed like a shuttlecock round the circle of deck-chairs.

"Um onca pintada!"

An uneasy silence fell upon that very talkative company, and I myself felt a cold shiver run down my back, although an instant before I had been feeling far too hot.

Then the sound came again: long drawn-out and plaintive.

"Excuse me, madame," said an elderly man sitting somewhat to one side under a lamp, where he had been reading a book. "Excuse me, but I heard what you said, and must just tell you that that was a cow. There are a lot of small huts along this part of the bank and many of those living in them keep a cow or two. A jaguar does not roar. It miauls like the big cat it is. I hope I haven't destroyed an illusion for you, madame?"



I walked across and found an empty chair beside the elderly man.

"Do you know the jungle," I asked, when we had got our cigarettes alight.

"Oh yes," he said. "I know a little about it."

"Tell me the truth about it. Tell me what you know about it. For I'm sure you're not just a tourist."

"The truth about the Amazon, young man? I am an old man now. Over seventy-five. I have spent fifty-five years in the states of Para and Amazonas, and yet I understand nothing of them. I know a little here, a little there; yet I have discovered that I don't know half as much as the journalists who come here and wander around with a couple of people for a month or two. You're not a journalist yourself, I suppose?"

"Good heavens, no! I'm a traveller in dairy machinery. Before that I was in the motor car business. It's only a personal interest in knowing something about the place, since I am here. You are French, sir?"

The man was wearing the rosette of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole, and occasionally I had thought I could detect a vague French accent in his speech.

"I am French, yes. I'm the French consul in Belem. Originally I was trained to be a chemist, but then I became interested in all the other natural sciences. You have plenty of opportunity of using them here."

We talked together for four hours.

The company for'ard went to their cabins. The moon described an arc across the sky above *M.S. Virginia*. The ship was asleep, but for its thumping heart far below the deck. It was as still and bright as a starry night can be, and all the time, as he talked, the jungle slipped past and the Amazon muttered at the bows. Occasionally a



slight jolt would go through the boat, as the bows rammed a drifting, water-logged tree trunk, or there would be a hissing like snakes as she drove her way through a drifting island of rushes and grass.

The old man's talk was like the Amazon itself: a broad, majestically gliding stream of words, studded with themes, like islands, but always he found his way back to the old channel, however far he had wandered!

"The jungle is my friend," he said. "It has never done me any mischief. If a man with a name—for whatever it may be—disappears in the jungle, the newspapers raise an outcry and talk of 'the green hell' and 'lurking dangers' and all that sort of nonsense.

"If a man disappears in the jungle—it is his own fault. That, perhaps, sounds to you like boasting, but I have travelled the jungle in there as much, if not more, than most men. I have spent months, even years, at a stretch in it; but I have always come back. And I can't say that my life has been more in danger than it is when I cross the street in Belem with cars rushing along and the lightning playing.

"If you are not foolhardy, and if you *know* the jungle, there is no danger.

"You must leave nothing to chance. You must never go farther than will allow you to get back to camp before sundown, and if you have no fixed camp, then you must look and choose the right sort of place in good time, even if it means finishing the day's march an hour earlier. You must start early in the cool of the morning. If you know forests, you will always know where to get water. If you have any interest in botany, it won't be difficult to find edible roots. Fever you are only likely to get in the neighbourhood of man, where the malarial

mosquito can get fresh supplies in the blood of the infected.

"Snakes—yes, of course there are snakes; but so there are all over Brazil, and they are only dangerous if you don't look about you. And should you be bitten, well these days you naturally have serum in your pack. The most dangerous animal in the jungle is man. They were talking about jaguars. Everybody is afraid of jaguars. But I can tell you that I have never heard of a person being attacked and killed by a jaguar—unless it has been wounded or its young have been hurt; then it will attack you, but so will a cat or a fox terrier. Don't let's talk of that. But if you don't do anything to it, the jaguar will sneak away without molesting you.

"I'll give you an example from my early days here, when I was still afraid of the beasts of the forest. My companion and I had pitched camp on the bank, a little way in from the river. We were tired out after a long and difficult day. We hung our mosquito-net over a thick branch that projected over our camp and lay down. Just as we were falling asleep, in the stillness we heard twigs cracking under the paws of some large animal. It hung about, circling round us and rustling. Our rifles were in the canoe down by the river, and neither of us dared move. Then we heard the scraping of claws against bark just above our heads. Twigs and leaves spattered down on to the mosquito-net. We didn't dare speak, just lay and listened for the sound of breathing that came regularly from the darkness above. In the end, we were so exhausted that we fell into a deep sleep.

When we woke it was broad daylight. From the marks in the bark and the tracks on the sand of the bank we could see that we had shared our camp with a large







jaguar. It had come down its usual path to the river to drink, then, finding the way blocked by us, had stopped, sniffed about to discover what we were. It had been unable to solve that puzzle, and so had patiently settled down on the branch to wait and see if we wouldn't move on. When we didn't move, it had meekly clambered down and gone off thirsty to look for a more undisturbed place.

"Jaguars never come near where man lives. They flee from civilization. Where you find jaguar tracks, you can be sure that you are in virgin jungle. Jaguars are very clever creatures. I have watched them coming down to the river to get a fish for a change in their daily diet. I have seen them imitate the effect of a fruit falling into the water by giving the surface a light blow with their tail, and when an inquisitive fish comes up for the supposed fruit, strike a lightning blow with their paw and haul it ashore.

"The jaguar is called a cruel animal. To whom? It is possessed of great intelligence. It has endless patience, a perfect eye, and amazing speed in its reactions. I like jaguars; that's why I was a bit peevish when that woman mistook a cow for one.

"I've never been molested by a jaguar on any of my trips."

"Trips" was how he described his arduous, month-long journeys in the jungle. Not once in all our long conversation did he use the word "expedition" about his own undertakings, though it was frequently on his lips when talking of others. He avoided big words the whole time.

Naturally we spoke of Major Fawcett.

"I won't say that Fawcett was without knowledge of the jungle. He realized what he was up against, for he

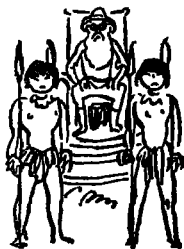
had been on an expedition in these parts before. But Fawcett was an adventurer. Behind his jungle expeditions lay dreams of a rich and powerful kingdom that is supposed to be hidden and forgotten far in the depths of the jungle: the land of Ophir, the vanished civilization of Atlantis, Eldorado if you like. His impatience to reach this golden land perhaps induced him to disregard certain safety rules which we, who harbour no illusions about discoveries of that sort, would never infringe.

"Many times people have claimed to have found Fawcett or the remains of his equipment. There are theories that he has remained in the jungle of his own accord; that he found the land he was searching for and that he is living there, a virtual prisoner of Indian tribes who worship and revere him as a living god. Well, in none of the known tribes of Brazilian Indians is there any trace of a religion in the least connected with the idea of a god in the shape of a living man. Nor is there any likelihood of anything of the sort being found among the tribes with whom we have not yet been in contact.

"To hope to find him still alive now, twenty years after he disappeared, would be mere wishful thinking. He was over sixty when he and his two white companions vanished. The jungle doesn't let you grow old. The average age at which Indians die is very low.

"All those theories are quite unnecessary and unfair in that they help to keep hope alive in the minds not only of Fawcett's relatives, but of those of all the other Europeans and North Americans who have disappeared on expeditions more or less inadequately prepared and rashly embarked on; some even on trips through the jungle made for business or scientific reasons.

"A few years ago an Indian came to my father-in-law's





house in Obidos. He had with him the yellowish skull of a white man and said that some fifteen or twenty miles outside the town he had found four skeletons arranged like a cross, as though they had been lying round a camp fire. My father-in-law collected some neighbours together and with the Indian to guide them set off into the jungle to find the place. As they went along the Indian began to have scruples. It occurred to him that he had desecrated a grave, and he became terrified. He said that the spirits of the dead men were already hunting him, gave a shriek and disappeared into the thick jungle. They heard leaves rustling as he ran off, called and shouted after him, but they never saw him again, and so the mystery was never solved. It's not easy to search for a few skeletons in the jungle.

"Perhaps they belonged to some expedition that tried to reach the Amazon from up in British Guiana. If so, they got within a few miles of their goal. But they weren't *entirely* familiar with the jungle. Perhaps, all they did was to eat a poisonous fish. One doesn't know. It doesn't need much if you aren't altogether familiar with the mysteries of the jungle. Fawcett and his companions may simply have died of fever. They may have eaten one or other of the countless poisonous plants and fruits. They may have been killed by Indians because they unknowingly contravened some strange taboo or other. It doesn't take much, perhaps no more than breaking a branch off a certain tree, or stepping across an insignificant stream. You can never know these things beforehand, and the punishment with many tribes is death. Or they may have simply died of hunger.

"A man who has spent a lifetime getting to know the jungle has nothing to fear. A man who doesn't know it,

but yet goes into the jungle for the sake of the adventure, or for gain, is guilty of attempted suicide, and can cause a tremendous lot of trouble to the Brazilian State, not only because it will have to equip an expedition to look for him, but also because through clumsy behaviour or ignorance of the savages' mentality he may have instilled dislike, or hatred, of the whites in the Indian tribes he came across.

"How many good men do you think have lost their lives in the jungle all because some unscrupulous ruffian had previously offended the Indians? The Indians have good memories. An injury can be handed down from generation to generation for centuries, and it will be avenged on the next white man to come in contact with the descendants of the wronged. Such is the law of primitive peoples."

The jungle slipped past us in the night like a black, silent shadow. The moon was on the point of setting and the stars were shining more brightly. And that black band of water stretched away astern hour after hour, always the same. It is the same for 3700 miles from the Atlantic right across South America. It is not till it approaches the Andes that the river changes its character and the endless flat expanse of the jungle gives place to steep mountain slopes.

"Uniform?" said the old man, getting out of his chair to walk across to the rail and gaze at the jungle. "It appears uniform enough. Deadly tedious. To all appearances just the same piece repeated over and over again, endlessly. But come ashore with me and I'll show you that not one yard of the bank or of the jungle is the same as the next. Different plants, different insects, new forms of life. I have been studying all that for fifty-five years,



and yet the results I have achieved are no greater than a speck of dust compared with the world there is to know.

"There is no system in the work here. The task is so huge that most scientists recoil from it. Southern Brazil has long since been mapped more or less satisfactorily, but most of the maps of these parts are completely misleading. And that isn't just true of the country along the small tributaries, but of the whole course of the Amazon. They aren't really anything more than sketches. Here are thousands of new kinds of animals and plants that have yet to be named.

"But don't think that there is any hope of meeting unknown animals of any appreciable size, nor dream of finding in the depths of the jungle descendants of the great beasts of prehistoric times that have long since died out elsewhere in the world. Take a sober old scientist's word for it, that all animals of any size worth mentioning have long since been classified and allotted their place in the card index. The unknown animals that I'm talking about are the quite small ones: reptiles, insects and at the most small birds. You see, for us scientists it is just as fascinating to catalogue those small creatures.

"Ah, yes! The Amazon is a fairy story you never grow tired of. And you don't need to equip huge expeditions and dive deep into the jungle to find it. Just sit down on the river bank and dig in the sand there, and you'll be right in among it.

"But my advice to you is rather: don't do it. Stick to your milking machines or whatever it is you sell; otherwise it may go with you as it did with me. Good night, sir! I hope the jaguar's hollow roar won't wake you too much during the night!"



"Who was the man I was sitting talking with?" I asked the Captain, as I went up on to the bridge to have a look at the chart before turning in.

"Didn't you know him?" he asked me in amazement. "That was Paul le Cointe."

Paul le Cointe is the greatest scientific authority on the Amazon. He went out there when a young man as member of a French scientific expedition. That was some fifty years ago. It was intended that he should stay out there for ten months, but he has not yet gone back home.

Paul le Cointe is an honorary member of the scientific societies of many countries. I have seen his note-books, for he has kept a careful diary on all the "trips" he has made since he first came to the Amazon in 1891. They are old books with torn black bindings, their pages filled with tiny neat letters, like filigree work in red ink. As you glance through the pages the regularity of the characters reminds you of Sanscrit, or some other elaborate oriental script. I borrowed these note-books, and here is part of the story they told.

The expedition with which he went out to these parts did not have a very good economic backing. Le Cointe himself possessed a hundred francs which were stolen from him in a café in Le Havre, while he waited for the ship that was to take the expedition to Manaos. When he arrived there he only possessed one real asset, a collapsible canoe made in France. This he sold, but unfortunately its value depreciated considerably, because with youthful arrogance he insisted on demonstrating it to the buyer and had to be fetched ashore more dead than alive, after it had capsized.



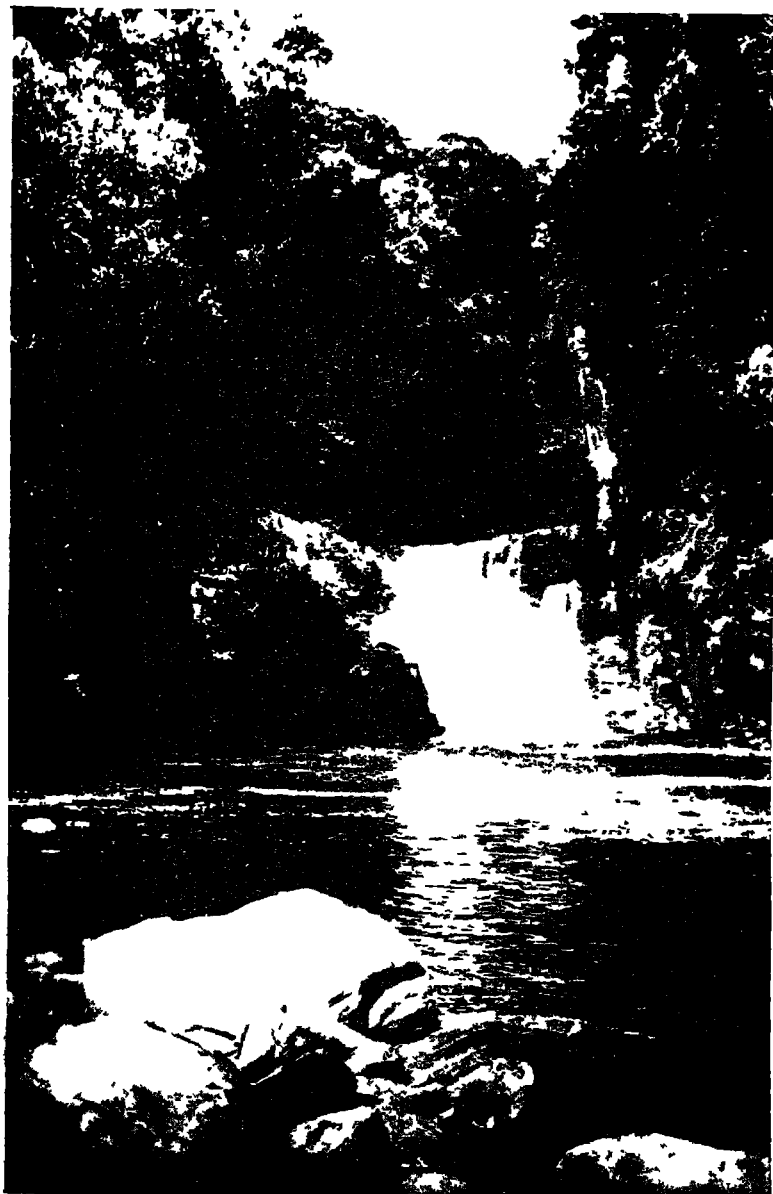


After that, le Cointe provided himself with a hollowed-out tree trunk, an ordinary cabocle's canoe, and in that made the first of the trips into the Amazon jungle that he is still making.

He started life as a chemist, but gradually, as one problem after the other caught his interest and imagination, he realized that they were all connected like links in a chain, and so he extended his studies until to-day he is just as much at home in chemistry, botany, zoology, biology, as in geology, meteorology, economics, and cartography. He drew the line when it came to ethnography, for he realized that he couldn't afford the time to take a further interest in the men he came across in the jungle.

When you dip into these worn old note-books that contain the results of more than half a century of exploration in the Amazon basin, you cannot help being astounded at le Cointe's indomitable energy, keen observation, and the style in which even his note-books are written. Humour and contentment are everywhere evident, and sandwiched in between notes of the measurements of animals' skulls you will find descriptions of the jungle that are pure poetry. There are observations on the transition from night to day, on the awakening of animal life in the jungle, and on the shifting play of light among the trees, that are most fascinating. If le Cointe's view of the jungle does not coincide with Hollywood's, it is not because he lacks imagination or a sense of the romantic.

Yet these notes are like his talk, difficult for the ordinary untrained mind to follow. He begins a botanical description, jumps into biology, goes on to zoology to illustrate a parallel case, spends half an hour



It is up the small tributaries that you find picturesque scenes like this





in geology and that reminds him of an economic problem that is bound up with just this question. It takes a quarter of an hour to unravel that, because it turns out that it depends on certain meteorological conditions which have to be gone into more closely before he can return to the point in plant biology that started the train of thought. Such an explanation can take several hours, but he never loses the thread, nor ever asks: "Where were we now?" or "what was it we were discussing?"



That is why there is no greater expert on the Amazon region than Paul le Cointe. Perhaps there will never again be his like. He knows every aspect of the jungle and river, for to them he has devoted his life. He has given a succinct account of what he knows in a book of 300 big pages: *O Estado do Para, a Terra, a Agua, e o Ar*, but, as he himself says, that is no more than the table of contents of the work that he could and should write about the Amazon.

One of his great interests is cartography. He has mapped most of the lower course of the Amazon from Manaus to Belem and his finely detailed maps entirely change our schoolboys' conception of the Amazon as a broad blue streak across the map of South America.

Even now, sailing up the river itself, it appears more or less regular and very broad, but a look at le Cointe's map shows you that from the channel you don't even see the full breadth of it. What you take for the mainland is in fact extensive islands. Behind them a network of channels cuts deep into the land forming lagoons, lakes and swamps. Yet you cannot rely even on le Cointe's maps. They may be accurate one month, but will be quite misleading the next. In the first place there is a difference of over thirty feet in the level of the river in



the dry and rainy seasons; and then islands are swept away and come drifting downstream, great agglomerations of flotsam packed so tightly together that trees and bushes can start growing again on them. They settle first along one bank, then by the other, lying there a week, a month, or perhaps a year, then they detach themselves again and drift on to anchor themselves elsewhere for a while and change the coast-line again.

Paul le Cointe married the daughter of a Portuguese trader from Obidos. Their honeymoon was in keeping with his interests. A French trading company, wishing to investigate transport conditions in the interior of Bolivia and Brazil, where transport means only water transport, sent him and his wife through the Panama canal to Peru, where the young couple were put ashore and told to find their own way home, the company paying the costs. The only condition was that they should make their way overland from Peru to Belem.

So he and his wife set out—in a canoe. They went down the Beni river with its swirling cataracts among the Andes, across Bolivia and into the Rio Madeira. Everywhere le Cointe took photographs of those parts which probably no white man had seen before. When they came to Rio Madeira waterfall one of their canoes capsized and went over the falls. It was the one with all his photographic apparatus.

After six months uninterrupted travelling by river the young couple arrived home and made their report in Belem. That was the beginning of his close co-operation with the practical world. Le Cointe began experimenting with *Hevea brasiliensis*, the rubber tree, on his own plantations. He studied the growth of the cacao and discovered in what soil it produced the largest berries.

He investigated the way parasites live, and there wasn't a sensible person settling in the Amazon basin to trade or manufacture who didn't first seek the advice of Paul le Cointe who could tell them what nuts had the greatest oil content, which plants could be used to make ropes, or why the rice harvest had failed along the Rio Xingu.

There was plenty of money in Belem and Manaus in the golden rubber years at the beginning of this century, and, thanks to le Cointe's initiative, some of it was used to start a school for applied chemistry and to found an industrial museum in Belem, so that awakening youth could make acquaintance with the possibilities of the Amazon states and learn to exploit them in the most effective method possible.

Then the rubber market collapsed, the speculators left the Amazon and went south to Rio and Sao Paulo, and Amazonas was the stepchild of Brazil once more. People only went there to get rich as quickly as possible by ruthless exploitation of nature and man, while government adopted a policy of the utmost economy in regard to the Amazon states, which it had milked so thoroughly during the rubber boom.

After a political tug-of-war both the chemistry school and the museum were shut down. That almost turned le Cointe into a bitter man, but he got over it on a new trip into the jungle made with the botanist Duke. Duke had an English father and an Italian mother. He was born in Austria and had become a Brazilian citizen, and was the most impractical person in the world. He was capable of dying of starvation in a provision merchant's, unless there was someone there to tell him what to do. He was six foot six, but for all his shiftlessness in the practical world, he became of great importance to le



Cointe, and they made trips together for many years.

Duke advanced the botany of the Amazon a stage further. Flowers and plants vary with the height at which they grow. Le Cointe had only been able to investigate those that were within the reach of a little Frenchman, but when the long-armed Duke arrived he was able to extend the field of their investigations with a number of new species.

The years have taught Paul le Cointe most of the natives' accomplishments. He can make himself a cigarette of black native tobacco rolled in a dry maize leaf, as well as any cabocle; he can shoot birds and fish with bow and arrow as well as any Indian, and he can lure the animals of the jungle to him with their own calls. Yet he can't dance the samba, and that annoys him considerably.

There is nothing very impressive about le Cointe when he is about to dive into the jungle on a trip of several months. He will be in an old patched shirt, have a pair of spectacles perched on his nose, and a soft straw hat drooping over his ears. No use at all for Hollywood.

## CHAPTER IX

### *What Everybody Ought to Know About the Amazon*

THERE were two priests on board. They were dressed in brown cowls, wore wooden sandals on their bare feet and a little black scull-cap on their heads, and so belonged to the Order of St. Francis. They were on their way to a mission station away up the Tapajoz River. To reach it they would have to go ashore at Santarem and on from there by motor-boat.

One of them was a devil for detective stories. He had already borrowed practically all that I had, and was now devouring "The Women from the Morgue." "You'll get nightmares from reading books like that, Father," said I.

He smiled and laid the book aside.

I have the greatest respect for these men in cowls who without fuss or show, just as though it were the natural thing to do, sell all that they possess and go and settle thousands of miles from civilization in order to help primitive people overcome their physical difficulties, in the hope that such help may make more acceptable the spiritual goods they themselves believe will assist humanity towards the millenium.

Time after time men of their own race subscribing to the same faith, have taken the most disgraceful advantage of their work; but that has never affected their tireless labours. Like ants they build on and seek to make good the damage. During the time I was in Brazil, five missionaries were killed by incensed Indians of the Matto



Grosso-Chavantes tribes. They were victims of the misdeeds of scoundrels. Yet other men with bare legs and wooden sandals followed in their tracks. These who man the outposts of the Catholic Church are men in very truth. Often they live a saint's life and die a martyr's death.

"How long have you been living up here, Father?" I asked him.

"Forty-three years," he answered. "Forty-three years in the river and in the jungle. I could not do without them now. They have become my entire life, I've studied them from every angle, and yet I am always finding fresh things to wonder at. I have read everything that has been written about the Amazon, from the very first book by Munke to the most superficial works of birds of passage like yourself. You are never done with the Amazon, once you become interested in it. Its history alone is an eventful drama, only the last act has not yet begun.

"Tell me its history, Father Federico," I said.

The old man looked across at the green endless wall of jungle, and quietly began outlining the topography of the river, and then the adventurous tale of its discovery and conquest. And I sat listening, spell-bound by his quiet voice and enthralled by the greatness of the picture he called forth.

No river, said the Father, is mightier than the Amazon. It and its tributaries drain an area of three million square miles. Along it and its tributaries steamers can navigate more than five and a half thousand miles through virgin jungle, gathering its products from the Atlantic coast right to the Andes. At its broadest point the main river is fifty miles across, and where it mouths into the



Atlantic it gapes 200 miles across the Island of Marajo, itself larger than Denmark.

On its back it bears the refuse of half a continent, which it loses only when it gets into deep water 200 miles from its mouth at Belem. Ebb and flow can be felt up at Obidos, 567 miles from the sea. In June the height of the water at Manaos, one thousand miles from the coast, is forty-eight feet higher than in October.

Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and the major part of Brazil supply water to this giant of rivers, and every day the sky makes its own direct contribution. Broad and placid, without appreciable fall or sharp curves, it flows through the flat Amazon basin towards the sea, bordered on either side by the jungle. Where it crosses the frontier between Peru and Brazil it is already two miles broad, and from there to the distant sea it only falls 260 feet.

Ships drawing not more than twelve feet can sail up to Equitos in Peru all the year round, and liners whose draft is not over twenty-two feet can comfortably go up to Manaos in the middle of the jungle. From the Atlantic to Iquitos is 2700 miles, yet there is nowhere anything dramatic, no whirlpools, no falls, the river's stormy youth is long since over by the time it reaches Iquitos.

High up in the mountainous region of Peru, to the north-east of Lima, near Cerro de Pasco, is an insignificant little mountain lake scarcely four miles long, Lago Lauricocha. In the north-east corner of this lake a chafing mountain torrent starts on its way northwards. To increase its foaming waters little streams bring the icy melted snows of the Andes' white snow-caps and blue-green glaciers.





Such is the birth of the Amazon, the largest river in the world, and it doesn't yet bear its famous name. The natives call it Marañon, and its course is north.

That little mountain lake is only eighty miles from the Pacific as the crow flies. It lies 13,000 feet above sea level where the air is thin and the mountains are crowned with snow all the year round.

The little river plunges swirling downwards and when it reaches Quichibamba, two hundred miles from the lake, it is more than eight thousand feet nearer the sea. As it flows along it intercepts countless small rivers and streams, and has now swollen considerably. Nine hundred miles from its source it picks up the River Utcubamba and together they swing east on to the Amazon's ultimate course.



Now it is a broad river. But it still has to contend with the mountains yet awhile. Here and there they crowd in upon it; steep cliffs thrust into it and press the waters up. Roaring and seething the Marañon tumbles on, flings itself upon loose boulders, squeezes through countless narrow defiles, the *pongos*, and receives reinforcements from every side. It absorbs the Rio Huallaga and the Rio Ucayali that come from the south, and a number of tributaries from the north. Water from Peru mingles with water from Ecuador, and after a last fierce struggle with the cliffs of the Andes the Amazon slips over the falls at Manseriche into its broad, placid course, leaving its stormy life behind it.

The mountains now tend to melt into the blue of the horizon. The lowlands spread away to the east in an evergreen billowing carpet of jungle. The Amazon is now the king of rivers, dominating everything else in the landscape, the alpha and omega of that tremendous area

through which it and its tributaries glide towards the sea.

The Amazon basin lies across the broadest part of South America, a huge triangle with the Andes for its base and its apex pointing at the Atlantic. The length of the base is 800 miles, then the triangle narrows to 200 miles at Santarem near the mouth, but after that it broadens out again and merges with the coastal plain on both sides of the mouth.



Roughly half-way between the Andes and the Atlantic two large tributaries, the Rio Negro and the Rio Madeira, join the main stream. These two are both about three miles broad at the point where they unite with the Amazon. The Rio Negro comes from the north where it and a network of tributaries drains large areas of the Colombian and Venezuelan highlands. The Rio Madeira comes from the south, and it has its tentacles in Bolivia and Paraguay.

On the stretch from Manaos to the Atlantic the Amazon receives its greatest and most numerous affluents from the south. The most important of these are the Rio Tapajoz, Rio Xingu, and, shortly before it reaches the sea, the Rio Tocantins flows into the southern arm.

There are no mysteries left about the Amazon's course across South America. The only point in dispute is whether the Marañon or the Ucayali is its real source. It is quite unnecessary to equip expensive expeditions with the object of sailing its length from the Andes to the sea. A Spaniard, Orellana, did that in 1542. He, of course, was hunting for gold, and he kept an eye open for rich towns and civilized peoples, but without result. Throughout the whole length of the river was jungle, mysterious and menacing. He left the bank and forced

his way in through the tangled undergrowth of lianas and roots, but that revealed no secrets, gave no promise of the existence of any Eldorado. However far he went, he met no trace of an existing or extinct civilization. A deathly silence reigned under the jungle's thick green roof of leaves. Parrots screeched at the intruders and insects attacked them. Brown water squelched in bubbling swamps. The air was hot, damp, and stifling.



It is most improbable that this endless jungle should ever have been the home of a people on the cultural level of the Incas, Mayas, or Aztecs. The climate is not suitable for the development of any higher form of civilization. The pure dry air of the Peruvian highlands is more conducive to thought than the intolerable, damp heat of the Amazon swamps which stupifies the mind, whatever the season of the year. No signs of any higher form of development in the past have been found among any of the Indian tribes now living in the Amazon basin. Should any such have ever existed and died out, the jungle would have hidden every trace of it in the course of a few years.

The tribes that first settled in this country had to employ all their initiative in merely maintaining life. They must have had genius of a sort, for they learned how to wash the poison out of the manioc plant and so make of it an excellent food that is still one of the bases of Brazil's diet: farofa. They experimented with other plants to get poisons to smear on the tips of their arrows. They perfected the art of the blow-pipe. They learned to build little craft and manoeuvre them through the whirlpools and rapids of the tributaries. But all the same they have left no evidence of culture or civilization that went further than such necessities of every-day life.

But to return to Orellana's expedition.

It was in the year 1500 that Vicente Yanez, a Spaniard, made the discovery that the long tongue of turgid water that stretched from the north coast of South America, hundreds of miles into the blue Atlantic, came from a mighty river. With four caravelles he sailed on through the confusion of drifting tree-trunks and bobbing islands of grass that were being swept with the fresh water far out to sea, discovered one of the Amazon's two mouths, and continued up it for several miles before he went ashore. He was received by gaping natives who poured down to the bank to see what were these strange canoes with big white wings that had suddenly appeared in the river and spewed pallid men with weird clothes and strange weapons on to their flat muddy shore. The natives were inquisitive and a little nervous, but they approached the strangers with smiles and offers of hospitality.



Vicente Yanez followed the method of the conquistadors. He immediately took thirty or forty of the men prisoner, and drove them on board his ships as slaves. That was the beginning of the unequal struggle between brown men and white that has been a feature of the Amazon countries ever since. The hatred that deed implanted deep within the souls of those primitive brown men keeps rising to the surface and impelling them to fanatical struggles whenever the white man has made any attempt to approach or make friends with those tribes which live in the remoter parts.

Yanez gave the river the first of the long series of names it was to bear. Impressed by the magnitude of a stream of fresh water that was able to set its mark far out in the mighty Atlantic, he called the river *Santa Maria de la Mar Dulce*.

The next ship that left the conquistadors' headquarters in the Antilles, bound for Spain, carried with it a collection of blow-pipes, raw rubber, red timber and other odds and ends. Of course, it was of no value, but perhaps it would amuse Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand to see them.

The Amazon had been discovered.

The years passed. The interests of Spain and of the conquistadors were centred on the Pacific coast of South America, on the other side of the Andes. From there the ships took Inca gold home to Spain, while a highly cultured people were tortured and murdered to extract more and more. When Pizarro had Peru and the Incas well in hand, he began to think of thrusting forward into other parts.

On his expeditions eastward into the unknown regions of the Peruvian highlands he went so far off the beaten track that he came to parts in which even the master-race of the Incas had never been.



Among his henchmen was one Francisco de Orellana, at that time a man of about forty. He had taken part in the battles for Cuzco and was well versed in the methods and strategy of the conquistadors. Orellana was with Pizarro on one of these exploratory expeditions that took them to a river among the mountains. Some think that it can be identified as the Coca River in Northern Ecuador. Their followers were in a bad way from the difficulties of the march, and many of them were sick. In order to relieve the others, Pizarro ordered a boat to be built. In her the expedition's heavy equipment, the sick and the wounded, were to be placed and taken down stream to where the river met another river. There, according to the Indians, was a land far more fertile than

that where they then were. The ship would be able to provision herself, put the sick ashore, and sail back with fresh victuals to meet the rest of the expedition.

The boat was built. Weapons were beaten into nails, the giants of the jungle slit into planks, and one day the boat was slid into the river and loaded for her journey into the unknown with Orellana in command.

Where the two rivers met they found no fertile paradise. As in so many other cases the Indians' tale proved to be but a myth without foundation, and Orellana sailed on. The current became so strong that it would have been impossible to have manœuvred his heavy boat back upstream. And then those who had been sent to get food for the rest of the expedition discovered that they could not even find food for themselves. They began to starve. The sick and wounded ate their leather equipment and bark and leaves from the trees growing alongside the river. At long intervals they would come across an Indian village on the bank, plunder it of everything edible, then annex it for Spain, name it, and sail on.

To have tried to turn back would have been suicide. Their only hope was to follow the river down and pray that before too long it would bring them safely to the sea. Perhaps they would be able to make valuable discoveries on the way.

They halted for three weeks in an Indian village whose inhabitants were friendly, gave them rich gifts of food, helped them repair their boat and equip it for its further voyage into the unknown. And so they set out again, and reached the Marañon. They sailed down it for fourteen days then again they put in to the bank and received the hospitality of kindly Indians. In this village they set about building a second boat. It took them six



weeks to do so, but it was bigger and considerably better built than the first. In this little fleet of two boats Orellana and his companions continued their voyage eastwards. The sick had benefited from the two long halts in Indian villages and from the good food the natives had given them. The boats were now well equipped and ready for what might lie ahead.

Orellana had started out in January, 1542. That June he reached the confluence of the Rio Negro and the Amazon. In July he discovered that the river rose and fell with the regular rhythm of the tides. On 16th August he reached the river's mouth.

The Amazon could now be roughly traced on the conquerors' map of the New World. But of an Eldorado they had seen no sign.

The little group disbanded when it reached the Antilles, having surmounted all the dangers of the long way from the Andes to the Atlantic. The men made their ways back to Peru, but Orellana was so taken up by his discovery of a link between east and west of the South American continent that, managing to find a small ship, he at once set sail for Spain. He would make a report to the King.

Orellana landed in Portugal. The authorities immediately seized his person and with mixed threats and promises of great rewards tried to get him to enter Portuguese service and equip an expedition to investigate that mighty river on behalf of their king. But Orellana was stubborn. He was a Spaniard, and the honour and the rewards should be the Spanish King's. For, of course, somewhere in beyond those mighty forests there must be an Eldorado. This dream of Eldorado was so firmly established in the minds of the conquistadores that not



even the most incontestable facts could disabuse them of it. And it still lives on to-day. Major Fawcett was its victim.

Orellana must often have regretted his loyalty to the land of his birth. His report on his Amazon voyage met with a cold reception in responsible circles in Spain, for Pizarro had got in first. He had sent to the court furious complaints about his lieutenant.

After suffering appalling hardships, Pizarro and his men had reached the agreed meeting-place, where Orellana should have been waiting with the sick and wounded; but when they came to where the two rivers met, they found that the bird had flown, leaving neither a depot of food, nor news in any form. Furious, Pizarro made his way back to Peru, where the first thing he did was to report the matter to the authorities in Spain, asking them to prepare a suitable reception for the man then making his way home under the impression that he would be given a triumphant welcome.

At one time it looked as though Portugal would reap the benefits of Orellana's discovery, even though Spain had had to pay for it. The greater part of the Amazon lay on the Portuguese side of the demarcation line the Pope drew across the New World so as to prevent too much squabbling between the two competitors, both Catholic nations, and so Spain was but little interested.

It took nine months before Orellana could obtain an audience with Prince Philip and persuade him to give his consent to a new Amazon expedition. Though he had the necessary permission Orellano found that nobody was very interested in his project. It was not an attractive enough proposition to make the rich loose their purse-strings. Thus it was a very ill-equipped expedition he



got together. It was, in fact, so badly prepared that the authorities refused to let it start, and Orellana had to sneak out to sea in the dead of night, avoiding the guards set to stop his leaving.

And Orellana returned to the river of his dreams. But his little fleet was scattered in the Amazon's very estuary. Then disease decimated the crews, and the expedition was abandoned. Orellana himself died on a swampy, mosquito-ridden stretch of shore shortly after his arrival. His young wife and the few other survivors were taken off by one of the other ships.

But the Eldorado myth lived on to lure yet other men to their doom.

Lope de Aguierre sailed from Marañon through the Amazon to the Rio Negro, turned up it and by way of Cassiquiare reached the Orinocco. Various military expeditions penetrated the parts round the originating rivers and slowly the picture of that complicated system of rivers was built up.

Monks began making their way into the jungle and pacifying the Indian tribes, to the greater safety of their white conquerors.

Then a Portuguese, Francisco Caldeira de Castello Branco, with a force of several hundred men, explored the area to the south of the mouth of the Amazon and founded a town. Santa Maria de Belem do Gran Para, which to-day is more succinctly called Belem, the key to the riches of the Amazon country. Using Belem as their base the pioneers continued their expeditions into the interior.

Two Franciscan monks who had escaped being massacred in a little fort in the interior of Ecuador fled down



the River Napo in a fragile little native canoe, and after two years or so turned up in Belem.

The main features of the Amazon basin were gradually being revealed.

In 1637 the Governor in Belem despatched a large, well-organized expedition up river in some fifty canoes. Led by Pedro de Texeira the expedition reached Quito in Ecuador one year later. This was the first time a white man had travelled up the Amazon from east to west. Not content with this Texeira repeated his exploit, this time accompanied by two Spanish monks. They carefully noted down all their observations, with the result that the first travel book about the Amazon appeared in Madrid in the year 1641. The three centuries that have passed since then have produced a stream of books as mighty in its own way as the river itself.

The account written by those two Spanish monks shows that the trip was made without anything soul-shaking occurring. Yet this did not prevent the ordinary person from still surrounding the word Amazon with all the glamour of adventure, and he still does so to-day even though ocean-going liners enter its broad mouth at close intervals and sail on deep into the jungle-heart of South America.

The Amazon itself is an international waterway like the Mississippi and the Danube. Its veil of mystery it borrows from its surroundings, from the immense forest-clad lowlands that it drains, from their impenetrable jungle and their network of small rivers that man has been trying to subdue since 1542 and which he has explored, and is still exploring, without coming much nearer the day when he will be able to say that the Amazon district is wholly mapped. Until that day



comes the Eldorado myth and the mystery attaching to the very word Amazon will never lose currency.



The Indians hit back in defence of their territory. During the centuries that followed Texeira's exploit numerous explorers were murdered and their attendants massacred. These primitive peoples could see no difference between those who came to plunder them and drag them off into slavery, and those of the same light complexion who came wanting to teach them pretty manners. Also, they quickly learned that the sword and firearms were not the only things they had to fear when the white man approached. In his footsteps came diseases that had never been known in the jungle before and to which the jungle-dwellers were quite unresisting. In 1660 forty thousand Indians died of smallpox in Borja district. Fresh epidemics followed.

The missionaries fought heroically till they dropped against the Indians' suspicion and the insidious diseases of the jungle, but they fought without appreciable result. Even now the church's influence extends no more than a few miles from the river's banks.

The first organized scientific expedition to be sent out to examine conditions in the Amazon basin was a French one. It left Paris in 1735 and travelled the whole of the Amazon's course from Quito to Belem. Its leader was the famous explorer de la Condamine. He was followed in 1799 by the still more famous Alexander von Humboldt. Since then a long series of brave men have gone there to write fresh pages in the book of the Amazon that is far from completed yet.

The narrow primitive canoes of the earlier travellers have given place to flying-boats, the laboriously drawn maps and sketches been replaced by aerial photographs;

but we still have only touched the fringe of the work that has to be done before the blank patch of the Amazon basin can be replaced with a detailed map and description.

Scientists of every nationality have worked alongside Brazil's investigators. From being purely scientific their work is becoming more and more concerned with economics and industry, as it grows increasingly necessary to discover ways and means of utilizing the still dormant wealth of that gigantic area. Among all the expeditions sent out for the purposes you will still now and again find one whose scientific purpose is but a thin veil covering a thirst for adventure and love of sensation. It is the accounts of such expeditions that keep the aura of mystery intact round the mighty river's name.

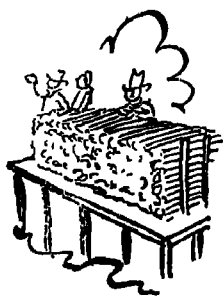
The world having progressively shrunk during the last century, people cling fanatically to their last few opportunities to dream of Eldorado. They stubbornly build their Castles-in-Spain in the few scattered blank spots that still remain on the map of the world. And that world will be a deal poorer the day the last blank spot is filled in; though, of course, sensible people will point to the new oil wells and deposits of iron ore, and say that it is much richer.



## CHAPTER X

### *The Bishop's Sash and Ford's Rubber Trees*

*M.S. Virginia* forged steadily ahead towards Manaos with greasy oil-smoke trailing from her funnel. At intervals she swept past one of the small huts that stud the edge of the endless jungle and look so ineffably forlorn. Every so often, we would see out in the river a narrow platform mounted on tall stakes and linked with the shore by a long bridge carrying trolley-rails that vanished into green grass in front of a low wooden building on the bank. As a rule, one or two men would be standing lolling against some huge piles of firewood neatly stacked on the platform. Sometimes the men would wave to us; at others, they ignored us like grooms standing outside an old-fashioned stable with nose-bags ready, while they watched the motor-cars roaring past down the highway.



When we passed one of these platforms, the smoke from the funnel would become specially greasy and challenging.

A few years ago river traffic was impossible without these platforms, alongside whose rickety structures the little steamers would put in at short intervals to take on firewood for their furnaces. Even to-day most of the local traffic between the towns is carried by wood-fired steamers. In the old days, before the State took over communications on the river, the captains of competing steamers took delight in cleaning out a depot and steaming off, leaving it without a stick for the next comer, who

would have to hound crew and passengers ashore with saws and axes to fell trees, without which the voyage could not continue. Such a trick could cause a rival to be several days late. However, the *M.S. Virginia* was oil-fired and did not have to think of re-fuelling until she reached Manaus and her journey's end.

There were many on board with the time to watch what was happening on shore. As well as the two priests we had a bishop with us. The bishop wasn't nearly so nice as the two humble Franciscans. Dignified and aloof, he glided round in a mouse-grey cassock held together at the waist by a broad beige-coloured belt of heavy taffeta with silk tassels. It was this belt that later kept the boat in a state of the wildest commotion for a whole day.



That morning, His Eminence had chosen the ship's best deckchair as a suitable and comfortable place in which to meditate on existence. For greater comfort he had removed his tight belt and hung it over the arm of the deck-chair. Then he had got up and gone for a moment to his cabin. When he came back the belt was gone. There wasn't a breath of wind, and so not the remotest possibility of its having been blown overboard. It could hardly have been theft, for who but a bishop could want an episcopal taffeta belt? Especially one of so dreary a colour in Brazil, that land of joyous colours.

To put it bluntly, this seemed to be a case of malicious sabotage, bordering on sacrilege, aimed specifically at the Church in Rome. Or at any rate that was the conclusion reached after a whispered conference between the bishop and the two Franciscans whom he had hastily summoned, and whom he at once despatched on an exploratory prowl.

I nodded to *my* monk as he slipped past peering in every direction. Perhaps it *was* a good thing that he had been such an industrious reader of detective stories.

The two monks, discreet and whispering, hunted for half an hour but without result. After that others were called in. The entire Catholic portion of the passengers was mobilized, and of course their suspicions at once turned on the Protestants and godless. Everybody suspected everybody else, while the bishop walked round in a huff. It was his one and only belt. Without it he was like a pregnant woman. Every puff of wind off the river blew him up like a balloon, and he had to keep his hands clamped on his thighs like a woman in stormy weather.

He came up to me, as the neutral foreign observer, and complained of the prevailing lack of respect and increasing godlessness of modern times. He was quite certain that the Communists were behind this. Communism, he said, was spreading with disquietening speed in Brazil. He had long since realized that the Communists were out after the clergy. For example, the monastery in Bahia had for a long time been receiving from a patron in Italy, large casks of wonderful wine for its own cellars. And what do you think had happened to the last shipment? The Communists had drawn off the wine and re-filled the casks with water somewhere on the way from the harbour to the monastery.



A holy war was declared on *M.S. Virginia*.

Many were caught coming out of cabins where they had no business to be, but it soon transpired that they were merely zealous Catholics who had been making a private search of the cabins of those of other confessions.

Several young lieutenants who had been getting on famously with the young girls on board discovered that a rash remark about the bishop's belt could turn love into sudden hatred. In the third-class four seringueros actually came to blows, and it takes a lot before the Brazilian will fight. The captain remained up on the bridge refusing to talk with anyone, while the steward retired to his cabin, thankful that the bishop was leaving the boat that evening at Santarem.

So the day passed with people scowling at each other and passing odd remarks. The bishop was the centre of a cluster of attentive people offering him leather belts, coloured belts, and string. We ate our meals in a very strained atmosphere.

Towards midnight, we reached Santarem, lying on the southern bank of the river silhouetted against the evening sky. There were very few lights in the street along the river, but high above the two towers of the church shone a cross of electric lights. We anchored out in the river and the cargo we were to take on was towed out to us in heavy barges. Small boats circled round the boat waiting to take passengers ashore. Souvenir hawkers stormed up the gangway with their load of trash: smooth-polished calabashes painted with palms and white herons, or with sunsets over the river with the legend "Greetings from Santarem" or "To my beloved" in pot-hooks and twirls.

There was a time when the people of Santarem came out to the boats with jaguar and crocodile skins to sell, but these have gradually become so expensive that the public of the river boats cannot afford them and now they are all sent abroad. American soldiers and rubber experts buy them to take home. Anyway, you would never see an ocelot or jaguar skin in Brazil. They bring





bad luck. Instead, nowadays there are decorated shells and large soft balls of raw rubber painted in all colours of the rainbow. There is little temptation to buy any of the things the hawkers pour on to the saloon table these days.

A violent electric storm was passing noiselessly across the river. Constant lightning lit up the town, not at intervals as in an ordinary thunder storm, but continually, like a huge paraffin lamp that just flickered a little in the gusts of wind that came hooting across the jungle and twined round the boat's masts.



The bishop was astern taking leave of the faithful who were flocking round him for the last time. In a boat waiting below sat others of the faithful, for despite the lateness of the hour, the congregation of Santarem had gathered to meet him. Then, just as he was straddled between the gangway and the boat a gust of wind came swirling round the ship. The bishop's one hand was clasping the gangway, the other groping for a hold of the little boat. The wind had free play and it took full advantage of the fact. The bishop's cassock billowed out and up, till it looked as though he were going overboard on a parachute, from the centre of which a pair of long thin legs dangled helplessly.

Someone laughed up on the boat deck.

It must have been a Communist.

But what was worse, several of those in the waiting boat smiled.

We left Santarem at three o'clock. I lay in the dark unable to get to sleep, partly because of the noise in the ship, and partly because it was so hot and the air so charged with electricity.

The man in the bunk beneath me was unable to sleep either, and kept spitting on the floor. One of the negroes was snoring. The noise of it filled the room. The man who for my sake and five cruzeiros had agreed to sleep on the floor had smiled rather bitterly when we went to bed, for though the steward had promised that he would find me a proper bunk in a proper cabin as soon as we reached Santarem, there was still no sign of it.

Santarem lies where the broad Tapajoz river empties its green waters into the muddy stream of the Amazon. It is an old town. In 1682 Jesuit missionaries founded a monastery there at the same time as the Portuguese built a fort, both powers seeking to gain control of the same district each in its own fashion.

These small towns on the Amazon are mostly placed on the top of a slope that plunges steeply into the river. There they are out of reach of the floods of the rainy season, yet in intimate contact with the river itself by means of a flight of broad steps or a steep street. Through the centuries, their importance has, alternately, grown and dwindled. When the conquering nations were fighting each other and the Dutch trying to gain the upper hand in north-eastern Brazil, the fortress towns were of great importance. When Brazil was finally established and the Indians along the river more or less pacified, the towns shrank, only to start growing again during the rubber boom. In those hectic years they were the centres that gathered in and exported, taking toll of everything that passed through them. Now they are again experiencing a quiet period.

The four big towns, however, Belem, Santarem, and Manaus in Brazil, and Iquitos in Peru, are still the key-points in the life of the Amazon, centres of civilization



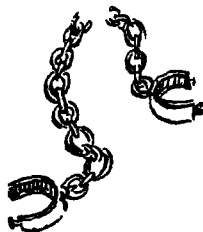
and culture, the marking flags the white man has placed at the strategic points of that green expanse where scarcely anyone lives. Nowhere in the world will you find the like of these solitary towns without hinterland.

In 1750 Santarem had a population of four hundred, to-day it has ten thousand. It contributes to the world's economy by sending cacao, sugar, vanilla, hides and animal skins to it down the river; not in large quantities, but, all the same, enough for the town to exist. Yet there is a chapter in Santarem's history that gives it a special position in the Amazon district.

When the Civil War in America ended in the victory of the Northern States, it left a couple of hundred inhabitants of the town of Mobile feeling disappointed and bitter. They were fanatical Southerners who preferred to give up their country rather than their right to keep slaves, so they turned their backs on America and went *en masse* to Brazil, at that time the only country in the world where slavery was still tolerated. With their slaves and implements they came to Santarem, settled a little way outside the town, and began cultivating the virgin soil.

It was not a happy experiment. The jungle was too powerful, the noxious animals too numerous, the markets for their sugar and cotton too far away, the overheads too great. The colony was abandoned.

Some of the colonists left the district altogether, others moved into Santarem itself where the traces of their influence can still be seen, even though they and their descendants have been absorbed into the local population. It is still quite common to find their blue eyes and fair hair, and the names above the shops and on the door-plates bear witness to the former presence there of



Americans. Yet these descendants speak Portuguese and do not understand English. This is the only case I have come across of an Anglo-Saxon colony letting itself be absorbed into the community among which it has settled.

One of these colonists had been president of a railway line in the Southern States. He came to Santarem with his two sons, and it was one of these, David Ricker, who was the first to try to rationalize the production of rubber in the Amazon basin. He realized that the prevailing method of hunting through the jungle and gathering rubber from wild trees like bees going from flower to flower for honey, was far too cumbersome and expensive. So he planted the first little rubber plantation on the river bank in 1884 and kept it till 1910 when he sold it at a fine profit right in the middle of the great rubber boom. Yet he was the only one to do this and his 20,000 grey-trunked trees were of little significance in the flood of rubber that poured out from the Amazon.



The next time anyone tried to repeat Ricker's experiment was in 1927. He was a fellow-countryman of Ricker's, but a Northerner, one Henry Ford.

Ever since the collapse of the Amazon rubber boom in 1912-14, certain wise men in the U.S.A. had been agitating against the tendency to regard the East as the only source of rubber. The Orient was so far away; the routes to it could so easily be cut in the event of war, even though the U.S.A. was not itself directly implicated. Apart from that, there was dissatisfaction with the high prices dictated by the English by means of the Stevenson Restriction Act, and also it was far from satisfactory that a raw material of such great importance to America's gigantic automobile industry should be entirely controlled

by another nation, itself a competitor in many spheres of industry.

Brazil did what it could to fan American discontent. Its government wasted no time licking its economic sores, but produced brochures, made investigations, and subjected American financial and industrial circles to an incessant bombardment of suggestions: why not give the Amazon basin, from which rubber originally came, another chance? The U.S.A. could get all the concessions it wanted. It was no distance from the Amazon to the ports of America compared with that from Singapore or Colombo. They would be able to defeat the English price scales, and need not fear a war in the East.

Henry Ford decided to give it a trial. His output of cars was by then sufficiently large to justify his trying to become his own supplier of rubber. Brazil gave him a concession of two and a half million acres on the banks of the Tapajoz some hundred miles south of where it joins the Amazon. How large was the scale of this enterprise will be realized when you remember that the combined area occupied by the rubber plantations of Malaya is 1,350,000 acres, of Sumatra 300,000, of Java 190,000, and of Ceylon 160,000 acres. Then Ford's rubber experts began their work partly on the banks of that fine green river, and partly deep in the jungle.

To start with an area of 8400 acres was cleared and a complete modern town began to be built, while experts in exterminating mosquitoes got to work. A hospital was built, then came shops and offices, club-houses and garages, homes for the workers, and a little harbour. They also built a broad road two miles long. Saw-mills, a power station, a light railway, all were brought the whole way from the U.S.A. to the banks of the Tapajoz

in Ford's own steamers. At the end of three years, in 1930, they had created a modern town with 3000 inhabitants and given it the name of Fordlandia. The two miles of road had grown to thirty. There was an ice factory working three shifts a day to produce a ton of ice, and a wireless station to maintain communication with the main office in Belem. A slaughter-house was built and small plantations of lemons, oranges and pineapples, and also schools and churches.

In 1934, 1,390,000 young rubber trees were planted. These had been carefully selected from seed taken from the most productive trees in the jungle. On some of these young trees they made experimental grafts with shoots brought from the Goodyear plantations in the Phillipines. These Phillipine trees had themselves originated in Singapore, which had got its seed from the Amazon. The circle was now completed, though the rubber trees themselves were greatly improved.

Immediately after this had happened, the English, Dutch and French producers of rubber placed an embargo on the export of plants from their East Indian possessions; but too late.

A rubber tree cannot be tapped till it is seven to eight years old. Before those in Fordlandia had reached that stage, it was discovered that the site had been badly chosen. When the concession was originally taken up the area had been inspected from an aeroplane. The green jungle had covered the ground itself and so no one had seen that it was undulating and hilly. Rubber trees should, by right, be grown on level ground; nor is it rational to use machinery when the ground goes up and down. Apart from this, it was discovered that trees had

been attacked by fungus growths which removed every leaf, with the result that the trees died.

Ford abandoned Fordlandia and acquired a more suitable area to the north, thirteen miles south of Santarem. And there he began all over again. The jungle was cleared and burned. The mosquito hunters got to work. Schools, club-houses, dwelling-houses, a hospital, a power station, water-works and all the rest of it, were built and installed. They made football pitches, tennis courts, swimming pools, built a cinema and a golf course, while in the shops every conceivable hygienically manufactured American foodstuff could be bought at the company's low prices. The hospital had 125 beds and its doctors and staff numbered 38 persons. There was even a crèche where women workers could leave their children in the care of trained nurses.



It was all done with true American energy and contempt for the cost.

In April 1939 sufficient of the jungle had been cleared in the new concession for 12,500 acres to be planted with selected young trees. In 1945 a further 26,000 acres were planted with two million trees. Then, on 1st January, 1946, Henry Ford relinquished his rights in Fordlandia and the Belterra plantations with all trees, houses, churches, swimming pools, and cinemas, to the Brazilian State for the sum of 250,000 dollars. Henry Ford had given up.

In those nineteen years, Ford's rubber experiment had cost fifteen million dollars.

Some say that Ford gave up because he had himself been attacked by disease in the new concession; others that it was because wages in Brazil had been forced up so high under President Varga's dictatorship, that it no

longer paid to collect the rubber since, by the time it was loaded on the Tapajoz River, it was already more expensive than the rubber of the East delivered in Detroit. Others again maintain that Ford was afraid of synthetic rubber superceding the natural product. Ford himself said nothing, but he had learned a thing or two in the Amazon.

The Brazilian Government is now carrying on his work. Time will show whether it can put its heart into it.

The workers on the plantation will welcome the change if only because they are rid of the American nutritional experts who forced them to eat asparagus, butter, green salads, tomatoes, cheese and other products rich in vitamins, but which in the opinion of the Brazilian working man are not suitable for human consumption. That was a very thorny question, and it once led to a real little rebellion on the plantations. The Americans had to take refuge with their women and children on motor boats and barges on the river, all because the native workers wanted to be allowed to go back to their beans and rice and farofa in the morning, at midday, and for their evening meal.

They will be able to now.

And because of that their output will sink to the level that is natural for the Amazon basin.



The next evening, I was at last given the bunk the steward had promised. It was in a four-berth cabin on the lower deck. When I opened the door the heat belched out in my face as from an oven. The bunk destined for





me was against the inner wall—the top one under the ceiling. In one of the others lay a young Mulatto snoring. Sweat was pouring off his face and his pyjamas were wringing wet. When I had washed, I pulled out my suitcase that was on the floor under the lower bunk and discovered that the side which had been against the wall was scorching hot. So I took suitcase, pyjamas and my toilet things, went below, got my other case opened and dragged out my hammock.

There were fifty rolls of colour film in my luggage, some exposed, some unexposed, and an hour or two in the heat of that cabin might easily have spoilt them all.

With great difficulty I found a place on the boat deck where I could hang up my hammock, so the bunk in that cabin was free again. The steward must have made a lot out of it.

Half an hour later the Mulatto came up on deck, where he too rigged up a hammock. He was followed a little later by the other two, one of them had a hammock, but the other did not and was forced to sleep in an uncomfortable chair for the rest of the trip.

After Obidos, there were four first-class bunks available. . . .



## CHAPTER XI

### *The Jungle's Riches and the Indians' History*

BETWEEN Santarem and Obidos the character of the country changes slightly. Small glades and level patches of grass where cattle can graze and a crop be grown break the continuity of the jungle fringing the river. There are clearings under maize, cotton, manioc and sugar-cane. Even where the jungle extends right down to the river, it has no longer the same clear-cut edging of mangrove roots whose effect is that of a boringly uniform grey fence, but now has a fine fringe of reeds and small bushes that is all the more pleasant because of its irregularity. Occasional channels cut in through the low grassy banks, and away on the northern horizon the country rises; not much, but still enough in this everlasting flatness for one to begin to talk of hills.



If you look at the map you will see that none of these heights exceeds a thousand feet. This is the narrowest part of the Amazon valley. From here it expands westwards in the shape of a gigantic triangle.

On a table-shaped hill, a so-called *meseta*, lies the little town of Monte Alegre. It is all by itself and looks out over jungle on every side. Monte Alegre, "The Happy Mountain." You would need to be very modest in your requirements, or very much in love, to be able to live happily there for any length of time.

Once when we went close into the shore to avoid some treacherous mud-banks in the river, the seemingly

uniform green wall of the jungle proved to be composed of a wealth of different tones and shades. Nowhere else have I ever seen such a rich variety of greens. There was the purest light green, greens of the yellowish shade that we know from the freshly burst buds of a beech wood, and every other shade down to the almost black. There was the matt, heavy green of the mango, and the light festive green of the cacao tree. Scattered here and there were tree tops that were entirely covered with flowers: splodges of glaring yellow, piercing red and pure mauve extravagantly sprinkled over the green. Then there were trees with shining silvery leaves that reflected the burning sunlight back towards the sky.

Broad belts of refuse were continually drifting down stream. And all the time trees. Some were the light-coloured balsa tree that has a specific gravity lighter than cork and lies almost out of the water; others the iron tree that is so heavy that it hardly floats, but ploughs along almost entirely submerged. It has been the cause of many a ship's foundering. When the wake catches them and slings them aside, the tree trunks plunge heavily like hippopotamuses.

So, the Amazon sends its samples down to the coastal towns and the ocean.

These jungle forests stretch more than two thousand miles from east to west and for thirteen hundred miles from south to north. They occupy more than forty per cent. of the total area of Brazil, and are occupied by less than ten per cent. of the country's population. By far the greater part of this ten per cent. is concentrated in and around the towns on the Amazon, that is to say, mainly in and around Belem, Manaus, and Santarem.

It is almost impossible to conceive the vastness of these

untouched jungle forests in which there is hardly a sign of man to be seen. No one knows how many different kinds of trees grow in them. No one knows what unknown kinds of animals may not be hiding beneath their thick roof of leaves. It is fairly certain that there will be no surprising discoveries of unknown large animals, but new species of insects and reptiles are continually being found. It is roughly estimated that there are 15,000 different species in the Amazon country, including 700 kinds of coloured butterflies, 500 kinds of birds and 2000 kinds of fish.



It was the trees of Amazonas that gave Brazil its first source of income, and one, the Pau Brazil, gave the country its name. The jungle is full of magnificent varieties, but the large trees are scattered about country that is next to inaccessible, too scattered for there to be any hope of large-scale exploitation. Some of the giants tower two hundred and forty feet above the undergrowth. There is the para-chestnut lavishly strewing its triangular Brazil nuts about the jungle, though it is only from those trees growing near the towns or villages that man reaps any benefit. The para-chestnut takes great care of its seed. It keeps them in a round, hermetically sealed container until such time as they are ripe and able to look after themselves. When that time comes, a circular lid falls off the lower end of the container, and the nuts fall out leaving the container hanging like an inverted bird's nest.

There is the *ceiba*, one of the largest trees in the New World, and the kapok, the white down of which is used in powder and life-belts. There is the *pau rosa* whose timber is used in the manufacture of scent essences. There are cedars, perobas, audiobas and satinwood; trees whose

wood is almost black, like ebony, or red like blood, or yellow, or golden, or chalk-white. There are trees with the quality of teak, and others with lovely patterns like the bird's-eye tree. There are mahoganies of various kinds, the steel tree, the wood of which is so hard that a saw's teeth break on it; and there are trees whose fruit contains valuable oils for which industry is clamouring. Medicinal oils like castor oil and copaiva, wax and oils from leaves, fruit and bark for use in the manufacture of gramophone records, beeswax, synthetic resins, paints, varnishes, printing ink, shoe cream, linoleum, soap, cosmetics and edible oils.



The jungle has remedies for fever, constipation, venereal diseases and leprosy; quinine, ricinus, copaiva and chaumogra oils; industrial waxes like carneuba, uricuri; babassu and guarana. It has tannion, the bark of which is indispensable to the world's tanneries; it is obtained from the tangle of tough mangrove roots. There are ivory nuts which are used to make buttons, to say nothing of the countless trees and plants whose sap is tough and elastic: the rubber plants which are indispensable in the production of such widely different things as chewing-gum, garters, and motor car tyres.

And none of it is rationally cultivated. No one yet has attempted to make plantations where these valuable trees could grow in ordered rows. Scientific forestry is unknown anywhere in the Amazon valley, except for the Ford experiment with the plantations on the banks of the Tapajoz. Although the experiment was unsuccessful, it has done great service; for it has shown that with the help of modern methods, tolerable conditions can be created in the tropical climate of the Amazon valley even for white people. The President of Brazil has called

Fordlandia and Belterra "the healthiest district" in the Amazon States.

Intensive working of these fertile areas is not impossible. The obstacles may appear insuperable, but when they are attacked properly, it will be seen that they can be overcome. The first things to be tackled are tropical diseases and the noxious creatures. When these two have been reduced sufficiently to provide tolerable conditions, the great vacuum round these mighty rivers will be open for man-power to pour in.

Perhaps the soil that to-day is covered with the withered leaves and rotten trunks of centuries, will yield man minerals and metals, perhaps oil. Yet for the country's sake, it is to be hoped that if sensational discoveries of this kind are to be made, it will not be till the forests have been tamed and the Amazon basin brought under cultivation. Otherwise, the frenzy of the rubber boom will be repeated and a wave of speculation will sweep away all long-term projects and undertakings. Such a wave would leave behind it a sediment of human tragedies and forests as untouched as they had been before.

If the white man but reduces his tempo a little, there is nothing to prevent him thriving even in the heat and dampness of the Amazon basin. He will be able to harvest the whole year round. His cattle and poultry will be able to have calves and chicks in both January and July, and the trees in his plantations will shoot up quickly. But science must go ahead and clear the way for the emigrant. It will take generations before the endless jungle forest is opened up sufficiently to receive any significant influx. Yet there can now be no doubt that it one day will be.

As we were approaching the little town of Obidos on



the north bank, a young Brazilian soldier came up to me and told me that the wooded height I could see outside the town was one of the strongest fortresses in Brazil. It was completely built in the rock itself, and had guns that could cover the mouth of the Amazon, not only that, but they could reach right out into the Atlantic, should an enemy fleet happen to approach from that side. I didn't like to hurt his patriotic pride by contradicting him, but all the same, unless Brazil unbeknown to the rest of the world possesses some new kind of rocket projectile, I'm pretty sure that that fort can't shoot a shell seven hundred miles. What is more probable is that the fort occupies the site of one of the old Portuguese forts built to guard Belem from attack in the rear down the river-road to Peru and Colombia. However, the man was right in saying that you couldn't see the fort. It was in the process of firing a salute, but we only knew that from an occasional cloud of blue-grey smoke drifting out through the trees and by the dull roar that a few seconds afterwards rang out across the river.

The whole town was decorated with flags to greet its mayor who was returning home after a month's stay in Belem. He had gone there because elections had been pending. The Dictator, Vargas, had so disordered political affairs in Brazil that the mayor of Obidos had been in office much longer than was normal, and it had been thought undesirable to have him in the town during the elections in case his presence might unduly influence the voters. However, even when we were some considerable distance from the town, it was obvious that the mayor must have behaved exemplarily during the dictatorship, for though Vargas had gone, the mayor of Obidos had

been re-elected in the first democratic election to be held for many years.

Every boat with a mast had hoisted every coloured rag its owner could lay hands on; and every boy seemed to have either a rocket or a Chinese cracker, and these were now being set off so that the air above the landing stage was powdered with little white puffs of smoke.

The entire population seemed to have come down to the harbour. The civic dignitaries were assembled right out at the end of the tall pile quay. They were wearing dazzling freshly-starched tropical whites and carried black umbrellas for sunshades. Cheering broke out as the boat turned and the last of the fireworks were let off. The mayor of Obidos was home.

You could not call Obidos a large town. A single street running parallel with the river, a few small houses, a warehouse or two in which to store the produce of the surrounding country, a few shops, and dominating them all, a church. Such is the appearance of all these little towns. The amusements they have to offer are a café with a billiard table, its cloth in shreds, a cinema open twice a week, and the arrival of the river steamers.

A boat with a light blue main-sail and a rust-coloured fore-sail was gliding across the river. It looked lovely. Small canoes loaded with every conceivable article came alongside. Others came out empty to fetch what had to go ashore; a whole lot of furniture complete with wicker chairs, flower-pot stands and chamber pots. The usual horde of bare-footed, dark-eyed men and boys poured across the gangway and tried to sell us the usual souvenirs.

We didn't lie long in Obidos. Fifteen minutes after arriving, the steam whistle shrilled and the army of souvenir sellers beat a disordered retreat. The last of





them had to jump ashore as the gangway had already been drawn in.

After a quarter of an hour's sail, we stopped again, anchoring a hundred yards from the bank. We were to take on cattle.

There was a clearing on the bank with two large enclosures in which a couple of hundred cattle were milling round and round. A couple of *vaqueiros* were busy lassoing some of them. We were to have thirty head.

When a lasso had tightened round the horns of one of the creatures, it was hauled down to the water and driven out until it was swimming. Then the free end of the lasso was thrown to two men in a canoe who paddled out towards the steamer towing the poor brute behind. Its head was almost entirely under water. Only the horns and the nostrils were above the surface, and sometimes, they too disappeared. When that happened one of the men in the canoe had to stick an arm out and take hold of the animal's nostrils so as to lift its head up.

Eventually, the current and the men's paddling brought the canoe alongside the boat where a couple of the crew were standing ready to pass a noose over the animal's horns. When this was done, the lasso was freed and the sailors wound the end of their rope round the capstan and so the poor beast was hauled up out of the water, bumping against the ship's side and hanging with all its weight on its long pointed horns. As it was hoisted up it kicked wildly against the side of the ship; its eyes were staring with terror, and there was foam at its mouth.

"It doesn't take any hurt," explained the first mate who was standing beside me and had noticed the expression on my face.





A poor Indian village in the jungle



The Amazon's Indians are slowly dying out as a result of tuberculosis and other white man's diseases



"Indeed," said I, not being inclined to enter upon a discussion of that subject.

Such has been the method of transporting cattle on the Amazon ever since the days of the early conquistadores. Occasionally, a noose slips loose, or a horn is pulled out, or a rope breaks, and then the poor animal falls back into the river and is borne away on the current. That starts a wild chase with canoes and lassoes, but some of the animals are never caught and drown. Most, however, end dangling under the derrick and are hauled up level with the boat-deck where others of the crew are ready with some scales, a round shield with an indicator. The cattle have to be weighed as they are brought aboard in order to calculate the freight charge. Most weighed between 10 and 12 cwt.

Having been weighed, the wretched animal is lowered again to the level of the lower deck, where other sailors stand waiting to haul it in through an opening in the side. They seize it by the tail and hind legs, and get it swinging until there is enough momentum to pull it in over the deck. Then the noose is removed and they are all ready for the next animal.

Let us not go into the wretched animals' terror and sufferings as they hang swinging by their horns for three or four minutes. It is pointless to discuss the way to treat animals with Latin peoples. But, if only from the economic aspect, that method is a bad one. We lay there nine hours before the last bullock was hauled aboard.

If they had built a large primitive raft—and there was the timber there for the taking in the jungle just beyond the enclosures—and surrounded it with a stout rail, the cattle could have been driven aboard, being weighed on platform scales as they passed across. Doing it that way,

the whole thing would not have taken more than an hour. The people on shore would have been saved the slow and difficult job of towing the animals out to the boat one by one, and the crew would not have had all that work with the windlass. Also, there would have been no need for any of the animals to be lost in the river.

"That's the way they do it on the La Plata in Argentina," said the first mate.

"Then why not here?"

"It's not our way, you see, senhor," replied the mate and turned his back on me.



This primitive method of transporting cattle did teach me one thing. I had heard all sorts of stories about the Amazon's greedy little fish, the piranhya. Never so much as stick a toe in the river, they had told me at home. Before you know what's happening, the piranhyas will have eaten not only your toes, but your whole foot, down to the bone. To take a swim was to invite certain death. The piranhya can scent flesh a hundred yards away, and before you can shout for help, you will be reduced to a skeleton still making the motions of swimming because you have not yet discovered that there is no longer any point in doing so. In Belem I had been regaled with tales of canoes that had capsized and of how sharp-toothed fish had gobbled up all the occupants in the space of ten minutes: men, women, children and the dog. But then, in Belem, I had also talked with a man who thought that the boa constrictor was poisonous, and that the anaconda could grow to 160 feet.

On Marajo, I had seen natives wading into the river with their nets hour after hour, and they hadn't worn a stitch of clothing. At countless spots along the banks between Belem and Obidos I had seen children bathing

and splashing in the water, and nothing seemed to happen to them. And here cattle had been swimming from the bank to the steamer, a distance of a hundred yards, for nine hours on end, so that the piranhas must have had ample time to swim up. Some maintain that the piranha only goes after blood, and what is wounded, but there was blood there as well, for many of the cows cut themselves kicking against the side of the ship. But no piranhas came.

In other words, all that I had heard at third or fourth hand about this fish was horrifying and gruesome, whereas according to what I had myself observed, it seemed peaceable enough. Is the myth of this devilish fish as exaggerated as is so much else concerning the so-called Green Hell? Many things would point to that being the case, but my observations were so fortuitous and made within so short a period that they cannot be regarded as in any way conclusive. One thing is certain, rumour has grossly exaggerated its profusion.

I was standing looking down at a canoe that had run alongside with a load of lovely fruit. In the stern sat a sulky-looking youth stirring his paddle in the water to keep the bow of the canoe against the steamer's gangway. He was quite obviously a full-blooded Indian, but what surprised me about him was that he was just as orthodox in his dress as the most conservative Brazilian: long trousers, shirt, tie and jacket. And in that heat!

"Are they all wrapped up like that?" I asked a youngish man standing beside me.

"Not those I usually have to deal with," he answered. "But as soon as the missionaries get their hands on them, they become so over-modest that they don't dare take off their jackets even if they are alone in the house. Heaven



knows where that one got his tie. They can't usually afford to buy one like that. But perhaps it was a present from a tourist on one of the boats.

"The monks haven't been able to ruin the half-domesticated Indians round the rubber stations with their nonsense about modesty," the man went on. "And what nonsense it is when applied to primitive peoples who have first to be educated to understand that the human body is indecent. I once went into an Indian hut up one of the rivers, a few miles from a collecting station managed by a man whose wife was very prudish. There was a whirring sound coming from the hut that I could not understand, so I walked inside to see what was making it. There I saw an old Indian woman squatting stark naked on the floor beside a sewing machine, busily sewing. It was an unusual juxtaposition, if I may say so. I asked the old woman how she had got the machine and what she was making. She told me that the wife of the manager of the rubber station had made it a condition of her son and husband being employed there, that they must wear trousers.



"Well, they had bought the sewing machine from an itinerant Syrian trader for a lot of raw rubber, and he had given her the cloth and thread as well, and told her how to work the thing. And there she was busy making trousers to satisfy the white woman's prudery. But she was highly indignant about it all. 'Why on earth,' she said, 'should my menfolk have bits of cloth on when they are neither diseased nor deformed? They haven't anything they need to hide!'

"Nor apparently, did the other Indian woman I saw on another occasion down by a little stream near a mission station. She was standing scrubbing a lot of washing.

It was broiling hot, and to cool herself a little she had unbuttoned her dress so far that her breasts were completely bared. That, she said, made her a bit cooler. I asked her why on earth she didn't take the thing off, but at that she blushed deeply, and said she could never do that, as it would be indecent.

"Yes, it is not easy to teach primitive people to see the point of the white man's ideas. But that one down there in the canoe seems to have passed his exam. alright!"

"Do you ordinarily have a lot to do with the Indians?" I asked, pricking up my ears.

"A good deal," he replied. "For many years I have travelled with the Boundary Commission up there in the North. I am on my way there now. From Manaus I go on to Rio Branco."

"Tell me about them, please," I said. "Tell me everything you know about the Indians of the Amazon country, right from the beginning up to the present day."

"With pleasure," said the man, "that will pass the time nicely." Then he spat expertly at a water-logged trunk bobbing heavily in the current, pulled a deck-chair up to the rail, lit a cigarette, and began.

This is what he told me.

There are several theories of how the American Continent became peopled in the morning of time, many centuries before Columbus discovered the New World. The most probable is perhaps the one that the brown-skinned peoples slowly filtered into North America across the Behring Straits. It seems to be fairly well agreed that South-east Asia was the cradle of mankind, and either over-population or the spirit of adventure drove them from their homes. Their invasion of America was





of course made where the sea separating the two continents was narrowest. From Alaska the new-comers later spread out southwards to the American prairies and across the bridge of Mexico to the South American mainland.

They were called Indians by Columbus, who thought that he had reached India; the name is an entirely false description, but it has stuck.

Various groups of them came at intervals and set up various civilizations. The highest degree of culture was achieved by those in the mountains, where the climate is good. Neither then nor now has the Amazon climate at its hottest and dampest favoured the development of any high degree of culture. When the whites first came there was as great a difference between the highest developed South American communities and the lowest, as there was in ancient Europe between the Greeks and Romans and the barbarians who lived by hunting and fishing in the dense forests of northern Europe.

In Mexico there were the Aztecs and the Mayas; along the west coast of South America, the mighty realm of the Incas, and inland in the highlands of Columbia the Chibcha people. These people cultivated maize and several of the crops that are still grown to-day; manioc, beans, potatoes, cacao, tomatoes, and tobacco. They had learned to use gold and had a unique style of building. But at the time the Spaniards reached them, they had already degenerated considerably. Those were civilizations in decline.

Down at the southern-most point of South America, in Tierra del Fuego, and the other islands away at the world's end, there lived then, as now, a poor lot of people from the stone age who had no knowledge at all of the

high civilization of the Incas and Mayas. In the forest along the Amazon and the other rivers of Brazil there were scattered tribes of primitive peoples: fishers, hunters, and nomads. The farthest they had advanced was to clear a little ground near their village and cultivate something or other to supplement the uniform diet provided by their hunting and fishing. Nor are they any further advanced to-day than they were when the Incas dominated South America.



These tribes living outside the sphere of those great civilized empires were never numerous. They can scarcely have amounted to more than a quarter of South America's original inhabitants. They have not left many traces behind them. A few broken bits of painted pottery found on Marajo are the only evidence of what little culture they may have had; and some kitchen middens mostly consisting of oyster-shells found along the Atlantic coast bear witness to their having been there.

These scattered jungle tribes were certainly never linked in any way. They lived isolated as they do to-day, and fought when their interests crossed. Perhaps there are ten thousand of them left scattered about the vast jungles of Brazil from Matto Grosso in the south to its frontiers with Columbia, Venezuela and Guiana in the north. It is not possible to give accurate figures, especially as there are several tribes with which the white man has never been able to come in contact. Experience has taught them to be shy and they disappear into the jungle whenever one of the small planes in which people have tried to reach them, comes along; unless, like the Chavantes Indians in the Goyaz district of Matto Grosso, they put up a savage resistance and shoot their arrows up through the leaves at the 'planes.



Even seemingly peaceful tribes can show their teeth if they consider they are being molested. For instance, a few years ago an American officer with guides acquainted with the district, went up one of the Amazon tributaries determined that he was going to photograph some Indians. He came to one tribe far up the river, but he never took his pictures. Just as he had got out his camera and was focusing it on the chief, the latter snatched up his bow and sent an arrow right through the American. They are a nervous lot, those Indians.

Sixteen Americans dropped by parachute into the jungle north of the Amazon to investigate the possibilities of a direct route from Miami to Rio. None of them came back to make a report.

An expedition despatched by the Government to make its way through the jungle and down the rivers from Rio to Belem was twenty-nine strong when it started, but only six of them got through.

Most of these jungle Indians are small, unhealthy creatures and many are misshapen. Their's is a treacherous nature, and they have been known to follow an expedition for days waiting for a favourable opportunity to ambush it. But it is the white man's own fault that they are like that. When he first came to the country he was received hospitably, though with a certain apprehension. The Indians went to meet him with gifts in their hands and tried to help him to find what he was looking for. They had no gold to offer him, but they showed him rare plants and lovely trees from the jungle with fragrant and magnificently coloured timber.

And the white man repaid them by dragging off their able-bodied men as his slaves and by violating their

women. Later, when he had established himself in the country, he fetched the slaves for his sugar plantations from the jungle; and when he discovered how to use the sap of certain trees to make rubber, he found that he needed slaves again, even though slavery had long since been abolished in Brazil as elsewhere. He wasn't pleased at having to use the Indians on rubber collection, for their output was not as large as he considered it ought to be. So, to speed them up, he threatened that he would punish the lazy in such a way that they would never forget it. And he kept his word.



Even to-day, you can still see in the Indian villages in the jungle men who have been maimed by those scoundrelly rubber collectors. Some have only one hand, others have none at all. They were chopped off as a punishment for not being diligent in collecting rubber. Such things happened as late as 1912 and 1913, so it is no wonder if the Indians are inclined to be on the defensive when a white man approaches the tribe and tries to sell them more examples of his culture.

I have already mentioned the aeroplane that returned from flying low over a Chavantes village with arrows quivering in its wings. The pilot, one Antonia Basilio, had tried to propitiate the tribe by dropping a wealth of gifts down to them. As he circled round he saw the Indians collect his gifts into a heap and then set fire to them, even though they could see that among them were things they badly needed. That shows to what extent they hate the white man and everything to do with him.

A traveller in Indian country can only feel safe from attack at night, for no Indian dares go into the jungle in the dark. The day is good, but night is evil.

However primitive the Indian's way of life may be, and however much we may have that to him is wonderful, he will never change the one for the other. There was a little Indian girl, an orphan, whom the pious sisters of Belem took charge of, intending to give her the best possible education just to see how far she would develop. She was quick and clever; yet every evening the good sisters saw her sneaking up the stairs to the church tower. From the topmost peep-hole, she could look out over the jungle on the other side of the bay. It is hard trying to work on people when they are like that, as the missionaries find. The Indians bring their children to the mission schools readily enough, but from motives that are mainly material. At frequent intervals the parents come back to the school to see whether their children are getting fatter. If they are not putting on weight, they take them back to the jungle again, supremely indifferent to whether or not they can read or write.



We ourselves have a deal to learn from the Indians. Their knowledge of nature's secrets is amazing. However badly you get lost in the jungle, if you have an Indian with you, he will find the way to a river, even though he has never been in that part before.

It was from the Indians that we learned how to use the root of the *timbo* bush to make insect poisons and ointments. We know too about *curare*, their mystical poison that has been used in countless detective stories. There is no secret about the method of making it, except in fiction. We know from which lianas and plants the components are obtained and that the recipe varies a little from tribe to tribe. The actual making of it is a great ceremony. It is very like a thick syrup and is kept in a piece of bamboo stoppered with a leaf where it will

remain fluid for three or four weeks. The points of the arrows are dipped into it and then wrapped up in the white fibre of wild cotton until they are needed for use. The Indians can hit a bird at a distance of over fifty yards with a curare arrow using one of their 10-13 feet long blow-pipes. The inside of these blow-pipes is as smooth and polished as a barrel of a shot-gun. Curare kills any living creature with one strange exception—that of the wild pig. Why that should be no one knows; but the Indians maintain that it is true.

Curare is not the only poison they use. Another equally mysterious is called in their language "The silent killer." Who could want a better or more exciting name? It is also made from certain plants. Its characteristic is that it instantaneously paralyses the vocal chords, after which the victim dies in violent convulsions. Experiments are being made with this poison as a possible cure for infantile paralysis.

Some tribes make another poison by heating a frog whose glands contain poison, over a red-hot stone. The poison it sweats out during this process has a peculiar property: it congeals the blood of an animal hit by an arrow dipped in it in an astoundingly short time. A tapir has been known to drop dead a hundred yards from the place where it was hit.

In the evening, when you make your camp in the jungle, you can be quite sure that your Indian bearers and guides will withdraw by themselves into the bushes. It is thought that they smear themselves with some lotion or other, which they don't want to reveal to outsiders; any way, my man from the Boundary Commission had noticed time and again that the mosquitoes never went near the Indians. Whatever it was that they used, it had



no smell. He had tried to get the recipe from them, for it would be a boon to those who have to travel in the jungle, but they would never tell him what it was.

The laboratories of Brazil are busily working trying to discover the composition of many of the old Indian remedies. We must not forget that it was through the South American Indians that we got our knowledge of quinine and cocaine, among other things. People who now shrug their shoulders when they are told that the Indians believe not only that they are immune from snake poisoning, but that no snake will dare strike at them if they are wearing a sprig of a certain plant round their necks and legs, will perhaps live to see science discover that there is something in it after all. People who have much to do with the Indians have learned to be very cautious before they pronounce themselves sceptical about anything. Here, as in so many other spheres, you find that in this country nothing can be taken for granted.



All over the world children at their geography lessons are made to follow the course of the rivers of South America with grubby index fingers on an atlas; but in Brazil itself, people are not altogether certain how they flow through the country. For example, the course of the Orinoco was not found and mapped till 1944. If you look at the large wall-map in the office of the Boundary Commission in Belem, you will see that some of the rivers are marked in blue, others in red. The blue lines show the course it had previously been thought, or guessed, that the rivers followed; the red their real course as established by numerous surveying expeditions using every modern instrument. The effect is chaotic. You see, some rivers were found to run in the opposite direction to that supposed when they were first drawn in.

And it is just the same with the mountains. Not so long ago, Brazil and French Guiana had a discussion about the frontier between them. They discovered that they were talking about places where no one had ever been. The Boundary Commission my friend worked with has been in full swing since 1929, but it has worked enough to last several generations. It has taken over the task of surveying 7000 miles of waterways and has already drawn countless mountain peaks into the map which never knew them before, but all the same, what it has done can still only be regarded as mere sketches.

The Commission works in two batches of sixty men each. As well as the representatives of the nations directly interested in accurate delineation of the frontier, there are representatives of England and Holland to act as neutral umpires. In the north there are no dangerous Indian tribes, but the work is dangerous for all that. Several members of the Commission have been buried on the bank of a river they had been on the point of naming, or under a lovely tree in a landscape no white man had ever viewed before. And yet you can never be sure that you are the first white man to have reached some of those remote, inaccessible spots, for the old conquistadores roamed far and wide. Once, when the Commission was far inland up towards the frontier with Colombia, a Macuxi Indian brought a well-preserved sword to show them. It was Portuguese and must have been of 16th century work. The tribe had kept it for five hundred years, but the story of how they came by it had long since been forgotten. You can see it now hanging in a showcase in the Commission's offices in Belem.

Can you understand, said my friend, what a strange feeling it is to leave a world in which day after day news-





papers and wireless report fresh advances made by science; rocket aeroplanes that are faster than sound, atom bombs that can destroy whole towns, and to plunge into endless jungle forest where man's most dangerous weapons are pointed bamboo and clumsy stone axes? Sometimes you feel quite giddy at the thought that you are actually peering down a shaft of time several thousand years deep; yet both the man with the atom bomb and the man with the bamboo arrow are breathing the air of the same world at the same time.

Yes, it's best not to think too much.

At that point, my friend suggested a beer as an alternative to such thoughts. When we had settled ourselves at the little counter, the steward came across and handed me one of the three menu cards that appear daily on the tables in the saloon, their chief characteristic being the amount of ingenuity and imagination shown in compiling new names for the few dishes that were served us day after day without change.

"Would you be so kind as to write your name across the menu," asked the steward.

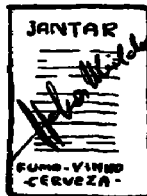
My breast swelled with pride. Had they at last realized what an important person I was? Had this nice, charming steward, alone of all the Brazilians, discovered that my signature would grace any autograph book? All right, he should have it to remind him of me when he sat in his cabin, or in his home in Belem sunning himself in memories of the Great who had sat at his table on the trip between Belem and Manaos, and not minded if the food was not up to the standard of the Waldorf, Astoria or Claridges.

"Have a beer, steward," said I. And he did.

When he had returned to his work, the man from the Boundary Commission gazed at me in amazement and asked if I realized what I had done.

"Sure," I answered, "I gave him my autograph."

"You gave him an unqualified recommendation of to-day's menu," was the reply. "It is the custom here to express one's satisfaction with a meal by writing your name across the menu. The steward has obviously come in for a lot of complaints and fuss about to-day's dinner from the other passengers, and now when they complain to the company and an inspector comes aboard to investigate, the steward will merely have to stick your menu under his nose showing him that even a travelled pampered foreigner had given a written appreciation of the very dinner about which he was trying to make a fuss."



## CHAPTER XII

### *The Rubber Adventure*

It was the last evening on board; presumably the last evening I should ever spend on the Amazon.

By the next morning we would be there, would have turned up the Rio Negro and laid alongside the quay at Manaus. We had already put into Parantintins and Itacoatiara, the last two towns before our journey's end.

Despite the romantic sound of their Indian names, these two towns had proved to be exactly the same as all the other little towns along the river; a row of houses along the bank, a church, a café where people played billiards and drank cheap *cachaca* to pass the time. And in each one the entire population had come down to meet us dressed in their best clothes to emphasize the importance of the event in the daily monotony.

Itacoatiara had differed slightly from Parantintins in possessing some red brick ruins and a broad flight of steps leading down from an old fort. It had also had a saw-mill a little way outside the town. But that was not enough to make you remember one from the other the next morning. There had been the same small, plump figures with rickety legs, Mongolian slit eyes void of expression, and broad cheek-bones, which constituted the majority of the men-folk on shore and in the small canoes that clustered round the ship. Their faces had been sullen and closed. Short coarse horse-hair had hung down over their eyes. A few of them had come aboard to travel



with us to Manaos, and they were sitting in a corner never speaking.

The broad belt of the River Madeira had already joined the main stream further to the south, but it has not brought any change into the colour of the Amazon as had the Tapajoz. Its waters had been just the same depressing greyish-brown as those of the main stream.

The howling monkeys had sung their usual evening chorus from the jungle as the sun was getting ready to go down. Large, colourful Ara parrots had slipped in couples out of the darkness of the jungle and planed across the river above the ship, their feathers flaming in the last slanting rays of the sun. Perhaps they were jewels from the trinket boxes of the Amazons flung out over the river for us to scramble for?

It was the Spaniard Orellana's people who, at the end of their voyage down the Amazon, had told how somewhere deep inland they had seen naked white women with long fluttering hair riding their horses down to water.

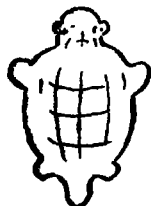
The Amazon basin was supposed to be ruled by a war-like people comprised entirely of fair-skinned women. Their city lay on the shores of the Moon Mirror Lake. Their houses were roofed with parrots' feathers, and they worshipped the sun in fine magnificent white temples. Once a year, chosen warriors from other tribes were allowed to come into the Amazons' country, and then they feasted by night, while the pale moon goddess made her way across the sky, mirroring her image in the shining lake.

The boys born of this annual nocturnal feast were killed, and only the girls allowed to live and grow up



to carry on the Amazons' active life in beauty, wealth and warfare.

After the feast, the fathers were driven away back whence they came, but before they went, they were allowed to dive into Moon Mirror Lake and each fetch from its depths a little green stone shaped like a fish, a turtle, or some other beast of sea or river. He who owned such a *muiraquita*, as they were called, possessed power over all other men and need fear no danger.



In those distant days people were so accustomed to the tales of strange adventures in the New World, they probably believed this one as well. At any rate, they gave to the river the name Greek mythology uses to describe women warriors. Posterity, being more sceptical, has refused to believe the tale and suggested that it may well have been just a poetic expression of the lonely Spanish conquerors' dreams and desires, their longing for white women. Yet the present does not rightly know what it shall believe.

Certain Indian tribes in the interior of the Amazon country have tales that more or less correspond with the account given by Orellana's sailors. Some of them tell of *cunhas-teco-imas*—"Women who live outside the Law"; others of *icamiabas*—"Those who give away stones in the forest." And, strangest of all, here and there in certain American and European museums, you will find a curiously shaped stone from the Amazon jungle, either bought or plundered from Indians. With a little imagination, you can see that it represents a fish or a turtle. I myself have had one in my hands, for the Danish Consul in Belem has one that he acquired away up the river at Obidos where he was born.

Of course, any one can carve a fish out of soft green

stone, but all the *muiraquitas* so far found have been carved out of jade, which is not found in South America at all, but belongs to the Far East, to the good yellow earth of China.

Scepticism apart, perhaps the Amazons are yet another of this country's unsolved mysteries.

Up on the bank stood dead trees with thick trunks and a couple of stout branches bristling out at the top. The luxuriance of the jungle had covered them with a thick layer of green creepers and parasites, so that in the light of the setting sun, they looked like silent ghosts standing guard with out-stretched arms over the secrets of the dark jungle fringe.

Out in the river a *manate* was snorting and puffing. These fresh-water sea-cows are as large as a dolphin. Every now and again it would come up to the surface for air, poke one flipper out of the water and lie there like a yellowish brown indeterminate mass until it dived down again to continue grazing on the billowing grass fields of the river bottom.

It was our last evening on the Amazon and the river had made itself more handsome than in any of the other eight days we had spent on it. There wasn't a crease on its surface, it was as smooth as new ice on a lake, and faithfully mirrored the sunset's orgy of colours. Day was clinging to the earth, so that the twilight lasted much longer than usually. The river retained its sheen as long as that warm glow persisted, but then the colours grew colder and weaker, while the sky became as light transparent and clear as on a cloudless frosty night high in the north.

When in the end the last gleam of daylight had disappeared, the moon came up like a smouldering bonfire



behind the trees. It rose gigantic and blood-red behind a huge kapok tree, from whose branches lianas hung in folds like curtains.

No sooner had the moon's reflection in the river bridged the waters between the jungle and the ship, than someone began hesitantly plucking the strings of a guitar deep in the ship's bowels among the oil-casks, dried fish and stinking bales of raw hides down in the third-class. The animals all shifted restlessly in their narrow stalls. A mule kicked back at its crate. Round about on sacks, packing cases and the deck, Indian women sat cross-legged suckling their infants: they were yellow in the skin, wasted by disease, and just stared with empty dark eyes out into the night. Some were eating, fishing their supper out of a dented tin with bony black fingers.

The man with the guitar struck a few chords.

Some fingers took up the rhythm on an oil-cask. Two flat hands thumped it on a wooden packing case. Again the guitar sent those chords quivering through the dusky space and again the drums answered. The tempo grew faster and faster. This was the slaves' dance, which their masters in their ballrooms call the samba. The impact of the moonlight on the ship had released it.

In the third-class they danced the samba with bare feet and ecstasy in their eyes, with swaying hips and violent jerks running the whole length of their thin bodies. Those who were sailing most probably to die in the jungle were celebrating their last evening aboard what to them was a large and comfortable ship. The next day, they would be packed closer still into a smaller, slower vessel, that would take them in three weeks or a month, perhaps a month and a half, to their journey's end, which would be some little clearing on the river bank with a

tumbledown hut and swarms of malarial mosquitoes dancing above it, on the fringe of the rubber tree country.

Up in the first-class, other feet in silk stockings and high-heeled shoes tapped out an accompanying rhythm.

We sailed between the two dark clouds of the jungle through a night that was still and moonlit. I was standing by myself for'ard and once again felt how lonely one really is.

A cricket was singing loudly behind a pile of packages. A large colourful butterfly had strayed by mistake into the bar and sat down to rest on a chocolate box that was wrapped in gaudy tinfoil. And, God help me, if that mite from the jungle did not outdo the gaudiness of the wrapping, even though it did have its wings folded.

In the saloon the long tables were wet with spilt beer. A group of people were playing poker for cigarettes. Two lieutenants on their way to take up duty in a fort far up the Rio Branco towards the jungle frontier with Venezuela, were writing letters. A negro who had been tirelessly playing poker day out, day in, ever since we left Belem, was sitting at the end of one of the tables doing his accounts on a piece of greasy paper.

You could see that his hand was unaccustomed to labour. The pink tip of his tongue slid from one corner of his mouth to the other like a pendulum. He was sweating and his lips moved as he added and subtracted. But he wrote with a golden Parker pen. His little pregnant wife was sitting on a stool in one of the corners gazing at the clouds of smoke above the tables without a thought in her head.

A young demobilized soldier who had continually been pestering me to go down to the bar with him so that he could tell me of his experiences in barracks in the jungle





on the borders of Dutch Guiana, had at last had enough to drink. His head was resting heavily against the bar, and his last glass of cachaca stood half empty at his elbow.

The negro finished his sums with a satisfied sigh, wiped the sweat from his brow with his shirt-sleeve and ordered a beer. Then he nodded to his wife. She stood up and walked across heavily and languidly, like a sleep-walker, and sat down beside him. He graciously allowed her to take a sip or two of his beer and was rewarded with a look of gratitude such as a dog might have given.

Quietness was descending over the ship. The barman was yawning so that you could see his loathsome pink uvula. Up on the bridge the pilot was guiding the ship on its ever shifting course with slight gestures of his hands. White gulls were circling slowly round the funnel and masts in the moonlight.

We were going all the time in and out among mud-banks, avoiding dangerous drifting tree trunks. There wasn't a light-house nor a buoy to be seen anywhere. The river was still smooth and shiny, only crinkled here and there by a gurgling whirlpool or a drifting island of grass and branches. Lightning was playing at several points on the horizon.

In the light of its few lamps, the boat deck was like a theatre set with the gaily-coloured hammocks that hung criss-cross about it at different heights and in graceful swoops, as its draperies. Women in gaudy housecoats and foot-length nightdresses were busying themselves about black-haired children lying in hammocks like so many little fish each in its net. Men in striped pyjamas were scrambling into their hammocks or standing with their arms on the rail gazing at the jungle. The cattle were



lowing down in the hold. In the third-class they were still dancing the samba.

Each time the ship approached the shore, the smell of the jungle enveloped it: sweet, delicious and heady, like scent with too much patchouli in it.

Happily tired, I snuggled down in my gently rocking hammock and fell asleep listening to the gurgle of the water at the bows.

When I woke next morning we were already in the mouth of the Rio Negro. I stuck my head out and saw that the river was black. The water was no longer the muddy grey-brown of the Amazon, but of a soft brown-black shade exactly like that of English porter. Where it was churned into foam by the bows, it had the yellowish tint of heavy Bass. Rio Negro, "the black river," certainly lived up to its name.

Two hours later, roofs and towers appeared behind a couple of low promontories. The golden dome of the famous jungle opera house glittered in the morning sunshine dominating the entire scene, so that even the twin towers of the cathedral went unnoticed.

Two hydroplanes took off, the water flying out from their pontoons, and circled round the ship so close that the rigging hummed.

So there was the town whose name and fate is linked with one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of the Amazon, Manaus—the rubber town.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, rubber was little more than a curiosity on the world's markets. It had been discovered that the South American Indians used the white viscous sap of certain plants to make various of the things they used; protective coverings to tie under their feet, water-tight containers, &c. European scientists



began amusing themselves experimenting with this new material which the Indians made up into balls. An Englishman discovered that it could be used to remove pencil marks from paper if it was rubbed over the written part. The name rubber was to be used on the international market for all this group of raw materials.

The Spaniards had come across it in the mountain valleys of Peru much earlier, and they had called the rubber tree *cahout-chou*, the weeping tree. Hence caoutchouc, the other name for rubber.

For the first few centuries after the white man had discovered the Indians' use of rubber it remained a thing of little importance. An attempt was made to make water-tight clothing of it, and water-bottles and elastic for garters were manufactured. A small elastic factory was started in Vienna in 1811, and in London Thomas Hancock was working along the same lines. He was followed somewhat later by Charles Mackintosh who set up in Scotland in 1823 and whose name has been immortalized in the word "mackintosh." Boston became the centre of the new industry in the U.S.A.

Then rubber soles became fashionable and scientists busied themselves improving the chemical mixtures of rubber. The value of adding sulphur was discovered. In 1839, Goodyear invented the vulcanizing process which opened up many new possibilities for rubber. Then came the man whose name has become the third household word in the vocabulary of rubber—John B. Dunlop, who in 1888 improved the rubber tyre with which the velocipedes of the sporting had been first equipped by R. W. Thomson twenty-four years before.

Rubber was now a pliant material and not nearly so sensitive to heat and cold as it had originally proved



when you ran the risk of your rubber soles melting on your feet if you wore them in a hot summer, or of cracking in a cold winter.

Interest in rubber had been gradually increasing and the Indians at the mouth of the Amazon had their work cut out to satisfy the demand, going into the jungle and tapping slender, tall trees in the way they had used for centuries.

Brazil had a natural monopoly in rubber, for the *Hevea brasiliensis* was indigenous to the Amazon basin. In 1825 she exported 30 tons. Fifteen years later the quantity had risen to 400 tons, and in 1860 she was exporting 3000 tons.

Rubber was no longer a plaything.

At this time, *homo sapiens* was busy wondering how he could move about his world speedily without using horse or steam-engine. For a short time he contented himself with his velocipede, and on this two-wheeled contraption, rode about the countryside frightening children and horses. Then Goodyear, Dunlop and Thomson provided rubber tyres for it, making it more comfortable to ride on and less noisy. The constantly increasing use being made of that magical natural phenomenon—electricity, also increased the demand for rubber. Electricity was dangerous and had to be isolated, and in doing this rubber found several new uses.

The Amazon Indians were kept busy satisfying the demand.

All over the world the white man was beginning to scent a new adventure comparable to the gold rushes to California, Alaska and Australia. Adventurers came almost instinctively and so did hard-fisted speculators. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the rush was



on. It turned the entire economy of the Amazon territories topsy-turvy, for a short time created an artificial eldorado with all the glamour of a fairy-tale deep in the jungle, and did irreparable injury to the Indians of Amazonas.

Homo Sapiens had solved his problem and invented the automobile which was to change the face of his world amazingly in the following twenty years. Now an automobile has four wheels and each wheel must have a tyre and inner tube. Rubber had now suddenly become a vital raw material.

Of all the rubber producing plants the *Hevea brasiliensis* was by far the best, and of it Brazil possessed the natural monopoly. And so the vultures settled in swarms on the Amazon country.

The Indians were the expert professionals in this new lucrative venture, and so the thing to do was to get hold of as many of them as you could. The country round Belem at the river's mouth was soon tapped dry and the search for trees had to be made farther and farther inland and deeper and deeper in the jungle along the Amazon and its tributaries. People had no time or patience to wait for the rubber to drip slowly drop by drop from a cut in the bark, so thousands of trees were felled and stripped of their bark from which the last drop of sap was pressed.

Patrols of adventurers sailed up the rivers, and, like birds of prey, swept down on the Indian villages along their banks where Jesuit missionaries had taught the brown not to fear the white who was his friend and benefactor. The Indians received them with open hands and were dragged off as slaves to the nearest rubber collecting centre, where they underwent a short course in



what was expected of them. That was not the time for namby-pamby methods or to respect the nonsense the missionaries talked, so the most barbarious punishments were inflicted on those who did not bring their allotted quota back to the station. But the Indians died, or fled, or were killed by the white man, and in the end there were very few within reach.

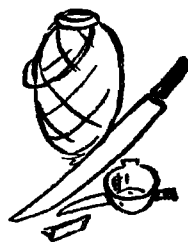
Meanwhile the world was calling for more and more rubber. The 3000 tons of 1860 had become 7000 in 1870, and grew to 19,000 in 1890. The price had risen from 30 cents to two dollars a kilo, and was still rising. The adventurers made desperate efforts to get the utmost out of the few remaining Indians, mainly by torture. Then chance came to their assistance.

The north-eastern provinces of Brazil that lie on a hump protruding into the Atlantic have always been plagued by droughts, and in 1877 they suffered the most dreadful one in all their history. Practically every animal died of thirst or starvation, as did half the population. The survivors found their way to the coast broken by the catastrophe, weak with undernourishment and ready to seize at any straw that might be thrown to them.

They were crammed into boats, large and small, as close as they could stand on deck, and taken up the Amazon to the rubber districts. There they were given a knife, a pail, a little food and loosed into the jungle to hunt for rubber.

And the rubber began to stream in again.

In 1903 the export of rubber from the Amazon had risen to 32,000 tons and the price to 3 dollars per kilo. In 1910 the price reached 6 dollars, and Brazil became infected with a rubber frenzy. What had happened centuries before when gold was found in Minas Geraes,



happened again. Rich and poor alike dropped whatever they were doing and made off for the Amazon like moths to a light, and with the same result. All over Northern Brazil, people left their sugar plantations to care for themselves; cacao plantations, fields of beans, rice and maize were abandoned to the tender mercies of the jungle that is always waiting to take back what has been seized from it.

This rubber madness was such and people so feckless that during the height of the rubber boom, when whole provinces were wallowing in money, there were acute famines, all because no one had bothered to grow the food needed by the huge influx of adventurers. The population of the Amazon country rose proportionately with the export of rubber and from being 95,000 in 1900, by 1920 it was 236,000.



In 1912 the export of rubber reached its highest point: 42,500 tons being shipped from the Amazon ports in that year. Meanwhile, where before there had been insignificant Indian villages, modern towns had shot up, their only link with civilization the broad turgid waters of the Amazon that carried the huge balls of raw rubber down to the sea.

The points at which the big rivers flowed into the Amazon were strategic centres for collecting the rubber that streamed in from every side, for shipping it to the factories of Europe and America, and for distributing the collectors recruited from the survivors of the drought that had ravaged Ceara. And so towns arose at those points: Santarem, Obidos, and above all, Manaus, became suddenly important. Their new importance went to their heads and they ran amok.

Through these towns passed a double stream; a black

stream of rubber making for the sea, and a white stream of men coming from the sea in numbers that averaged 20,000 a year. Few ever went back, so few that they are not worth mentioning. Those that survived the jungle, were so stupefied by it that they just settled somewhere on a remote river bank incapable of anything but just to sit there and await death from fever or tuberculosis.

Dazzled by the boom, Brazil built a railway between Madeira and Marmore to give Bolivia better access to the sea, and in exchange received the territory of Acra, which was rich in rubber trees.

Turkish traders came sailing up the rivers with cases full of all the world's goods and set up in business in shacks on the river bank. Their business grew with the export of rubber and the growth of the towns, and to-day there are stores of many storeys and all too much room.

People who could neither read nor write, lit fat cigars with bank notes. The laughter of French women echoed across broad streets that a year or two previously had been tracks through a swamp, but now were paved with marble shipped all the way from Italy.

A number of the rubber barons of Manaus decided that they would make their town which lies one thousand miles deep in the jungle a cultural centre as good as any in the Old World. They ordered a prefabricated opera house from England, stipulating that it must be more magnificent than any other in South America. It was built in England and then taken down again piece by piece, so that it was all ready to be re-built when it reached its distant destination. And there it still stands, its blazing golden cupola visible from far and wide above the green tops of the jungle trees. It is impressive with





all its real gilt, its majestic staircase and its gorgeous paintings on walls, ceilings and curtain.

It was built to rival Belem and the other large towns that only have the appearance of being great cities which they owe to the madness of the rubber boom, but while Belem was saved by its harbour when the catastrophe came, Manaus had nothing to which to cling. Shows are still put on in Belem's Teatro de Paz, but Manaus fairy-tale opera house has lain locked and deserted for a whole generation. The plaster is falling from the walls; the seats have been removed, and only mice dance on the empty stage. It is no more than a golden shell, empty inside.

In the mad struggle for the money to be got from rubber, the Brazilians themselves were shoved aside. This was especially so in Manaus, where the electricity works; the trams, and the harbour were in English hands. Banking was a German affair, the water-works run by Americans, the river traffic by Italians, and trade was all but confined to Armenians and Turks. But the Brazilian Government did not mind very much, for taxation provided it with a nice little share of the booty.



Pavlova danced in Manaus opera, and roulette wheels whirled round and round in its elegant clubs. The conquistadores of the twentieth century had the same mentality as their predecessors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; the country was to be squeezed of the last drop and as little as possible given in return.

No one saw the writing on the wall and the catastrophe fell upon Belem and Manaus while the champagne still bubbled in the glasses. Tragically enough, the seed of that catastrophe was the seed of the *Hevea brasiliensis* itself.

As early as 1878 the far-sighted English realized that rubber would become an article worth struggling for. Various mild English botanists with spectacles on their noses and specimen boxes on their backs began taking a great interest in the lovely orchids and other botanical phenomena of the Amazon basin. Some of them must also have noticed the *Hevea brasiliensis*. In fact, one of them, Henry Wickham, was so interested that he took a quantity of its seed back to London, and planted it in Kew Gardens. The seed grew and a sample was sent to Wickham's colleagues in the botanical gardens of Colombo, where you can still see "Wickham's Baby." If you go to Ceylon, have a look at it, for that is the tree that ended the golden rubber boom and brought catastrophe to the Amazon. Seed from it was found to grow excellently on the mainland and islands of the East Indies. Trees were planted in long rows and stood there gathering sap and strength till they reached the age when they could be tapped. The rubber they provided proved superior in every way to the Amazon product, just because it was rationally cultivated in plantations, and not collected over a huge area by individual natives, each of whom had his own method of preparing the black balls that were the first stage of the rubber.

The writing on the wall was plain enough, but the rubber barons of the Amazon refused to read it.

#### PRODUCTION OF RUBBER

|       |     | FAR EAST.    | AMAZON.      |
|-------|-----|--------------|--------------|
| 1900, | - - | 4 tons.      | 27,000 tons. |
| 1910, | - - | 8,200 tons.  | 40,000 tons. |
| 1912, | - - | 45,000 tons. | 42,500 tons. |
| 1913, | - - | 47,600 tons. | 39,000 tons. |

And by 1930 it was all over.



## THE AMAZON

|       | FAR EAST.     | AMAZON.      |
|-------|---------------|--------------|
| 1930, | 800,000 tons. | 14,000 tons. |

Once again it had been shown how short-lived is the success of wasteful methods.

In the Amazon districts each rubber collector had an *estrada* to look after. This was a path that he must himself cut through the jungle from the one wild rubber tree to the next. These trees usually grow in little groups and it is often several miles between one group and the next. Along this path, the rubber collector had to trot twice a day in all weathers. Some of the trees gave a good yield, others not, but on the average one man was supposed to be able to look after fifty wild trees. In the morning the collector went round making oblique cuts in the bark of his trees and attaching the little metal cups into which the sap dripped. Later in the day he went round again collecting the contents of the cups in a calabash. When he returned to his hut he would begin to smoke his latex.



Some did their work carefully; others scamped it. Some sieved their latex; others smoked it with all the impurities left in. Some smoked too little, others too much. The result was a product of very uneven quality.

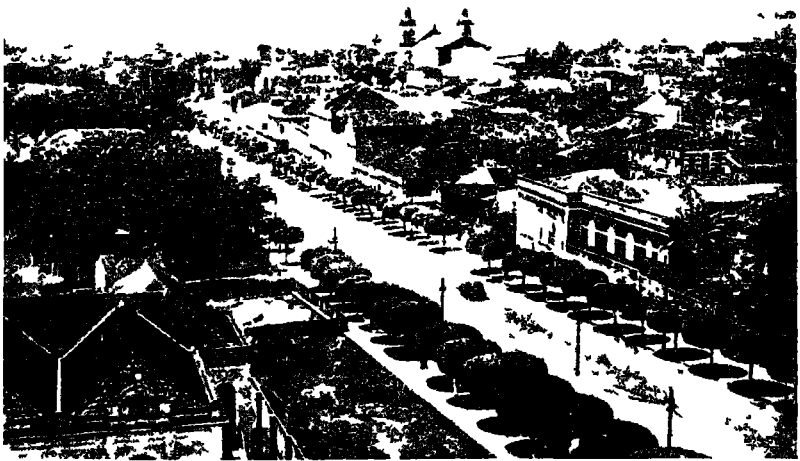
In some cases it was only a few weeks before the treated rubber ball reached the collecting centre on the river, in others it took months, and the rubber would be half rotten by the time it reached its destination.

Minute fungi attacked the wild trees and destroyed their foliage. Insects attacked the trunks.

It is generally, but wrongly, believed that most of the Far East's rubber comes from large plantations. In actual fact, more than half comes from the "gardens" of natives;



A dead turtle is emptied of its eggs



Manaos at the confluence of the Rio Negro and the Amazon



but their gardens are strictly controlled and only such new trees as are selected from the most productive stock are allowed to be planted. The producers of the Far East have thus increased the capacity of the individual tree from the three and a quarter pounds normal for the Amazon to between eleven and eighteen pounds.

In Brazil the *seringueira* can hardly attend to fifty trees on his daily rounds, but his competitor, the industrious coolie, who has only a step or two to walk between each tree, can look after five hundred. Again, while in Brazil both trees and rubber collectors are left to look after themselves, in the East both are under constant surveillance. The least sign of disease is attended to at once, and the least attempt to scamp is punished. Then, it is far easier to recruit labour among the swarming millions of the East than it is in the thinly populated Amazon country, where death and fever are always lying in wait for the solitary *seringueira* as he makes his daily round in the jungle. And in the East the rubber collected is treated according to the most modern principles immediately it is tapped, and with chemicals instead of smoke, while all latex is treated in the same way.



Another point—the plantations of the East lie on the trade routes of the world, near harbours such as Colombo and Singapore, but Manaus, the main centre of the Amazon industry, lies a thousand miles up a river in a part of the world where few large ships have anything to seek.

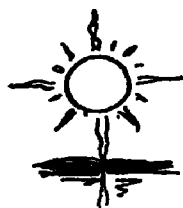
Under normal conditions the Amazon country has no chance of competing successfully. Yet Brazil has this advantage, that it lies in the western hemisphere. In the event of war this advantage can be turned into dollars, as was found in the years 1940-1945, after Japan had seized

the Eastern lands that produced ninety per cent. of the world's rubber.

The story of that short renaissance has already been told. It was in no way comparable to the boom years. Prices were controlled and the only increase was one of 30 cents from 90 to 120 cents for first-class rubber in order to encourage greater efforts. The agreement between Brazil and the U.S.A. was prolonged till 30th June, 1947, so that the people of the Amazon enjoyed two additional years of prosperity after the war was over.

It now depends on the Brazilian Government whether they are going to try to compete with the Far East and produce on a rational basis. That Ford has given up his plantations on the River Tapajoz would seem to indicate that the chances of doing so successfully are not great. However, Brazil does not seem inclined to give up without a struggle, and its own experts are experimenting with grafting and with means of combating the innumerable parasitic enemies of the *Hevea brasiliensis*.

Whatever the future holds for Amazon rubber, the towns along that mighty river will surely become flourishing yet once again. Some day, these immense expanses of virgin country will be opened up. The key that does that may be anything; finds of minerals, of oil, or of something precious that so far as been unnoticed or disregarded.



## CHAPTER XIII

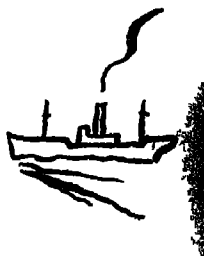
### *Jungle Town*

It is tempting, I must admit, to describe Manaus as though it were a dead town in the middle of the jungle, a sort of Boro-Budor with the glory of a golden past, but mouldering in ruins far from the world's highways. What dramatic possibilities there are for the writer who would write of it as the town that disappeared, the pulse that stopped, making it a sort of Sleeping Beauty's Castle!

Tempting, but inaccurate.

Life goes on in Manaus, though not as before, and people still make money even though not so much as in the old days. The Booth Line runs a regular freight service between Liverpool and Manaus, and other steamers quite frequently come up the river for small lots of smoked rubber, bales of hides, cases of crocodile skin and other products of the jungle.

From being a large, hectic city where anything could happen and where everything was done at break-neck speed, Manaus has become a sleepy provincial town, where people have to turn each penny over many times before they spend it. The parks are not quite what they used to be, and in places, grass grows rather long between the tram-lines at the upper end of the main street. The stucco has come off some of the house fronts, and the wood-work could do with a coat of paint here and there, but the houses are inhabited. There are still 107,000 people in Manaus and they don't live by taking in each other's





washing. They have adjusted themselves to life's new, more sedate tempo, and no longer throw their money about as they used.

The company running the trams noticed that in the town where money had meant nothing, people suddenly became very careful of their tuppences. Don't think that this means that they took to walking. They still used the trams, but they had acquired a distaste for paying the fare. They would jump off just before the conductor reached them, and used all sorts of other dodges. They preferred to be thrown off rather than pay. In the end it became a regular sport.

The company's English management worried themselves stiff over this, but they could see no satisfactory solution. The company began to show a loss and the shareholders to grumble. They sent an expert from London to investigate matters on the spot and send back a report. The expert arrived in Manaus and had a look round. He was a man with a good knowledge of human nature and a bit of a psychologist.

A week after his arrival, the papers announced that from 6.30 a.m. the following day the numbered tram tickets would also serve as tickets in a lottery which would be drawn every Saturday afternoon. Now, the Brazilian is one of the world's most inveterate gamblers. In the days of the boom he gambled with thousands, but now he took kindly to the tram company's tuppenny ticket. People fought to pay their fares and the conductors had to ask for extra help. Some passengers bought five or ten tickets for the one journey. Once again it was the fashion in Manaus to pay your fare.

The expert was made a director of the company, and surely no man has ever better earned his seat on a board.



No, Manaus is no Sleeping Beauty. It is just resting, enjoying a momentary pause.

When a steamer comes in the streets blossom into life as the curious, lorries, trailers, business men, loafers, and taxis stream down to the harbour. As we slipped in and made fast to the huge pontoons that constitute Manaus' harbour, there was a crowd of men and women in tropical clothes four deep on the quay. The whole harbour with its quays, cranes and warehouses rises and sinks with the water in the Rio Negro. It is a floating harbour connected to the dry land by a long hinged bridge over which a light railway and lorries bring the goods to the ships.

Manaos is the keyhole through which all goods for the interior of the Amazon country must pass. There too are unloaded and accumulated all goods to and from much of Peru and Colombia, the interior of Bolivia, and the towns along the three rivers: Negro, Madeira, and Branco. They are unloaded from large, ocean-going steamers and put aboard smaller river boats that take them another twenty or thirty days' sail further up the rivers.

Manaos has no time to sleep.

I hardly recognized the steward and his assistants. For the occasion of our arrival and out of regard for the reputation of the company, they had put on white, freshly-starched uniforms, in which they looked a little different from what they did in the dirty blue dungarees bearing traces of countless meals in which they had waited upon us during the trip.

A hooting ambulance made its way through the crowd of waving, smiling people come to meet friends and relations, and a third-class passenger was carried off the



boat For a moment, a yellow contorted face showed up strangely against a background of brightly coloured dresses, but then the ambulance doors closed, and people smiled again. No one went with the man in the ambulance. It looked as though some little station up river would be short of a man and curse at the expense of a ticket uselessly bought.

In Belem they had told me that I should not put up at the hotel marked in the guide books as being the best. The guide books were old and much had happened since they were printed. So, I chose the hotel that I had been told was the best. When I arrived there, I realized that Manaus has not much chance of working up a tourist trade. The hotel, the only one where "one" could stay, had six rooms. They were nicely kept and painfully clean, but that too was all they were.

I was never in any doubt as to who my neighbours were, for the rooms were separated by "Spanish walls". The couple in No. 4 did not live in harmony and the man in No. 3 read far too late into the night. The light from his solitary unshaded bulb shone straight into my eyes. Until the time when the good people of Manaus normally went to bed, the lamps were of little more use than a night-light; but when the town was asleep, there was enough current to make No. 3's bulb blaze like Eddystone Lighthouse. Running water was an unknown phenomenon. There was a water jug standing in a basin it did not match, and a blue enamel slop pail. The bath room was the only place in which water was laid on. There was a shower bath there with a rose of whose 164 holes only four were not blocked. From these the water dripped very gently when the tap was turned full on.



No, it was not a hotel for romantic young couples on their honeymoon.

There were no ceilings to the rooms and when you lay in bed you could count the rafters and the tiles. The first night I woke up with a start. Things were scraping over the tiles, scrambling up the slope of the roof, there were whinings and groans, and flapping and squawks, and it sounded as though huge wings were swishing through the air. They were. A quarrel had broken out among the vultures perching on the roof.

It wasn't a hotel for the superstitious either.

But there were clean white cloths on the tables in the little dining room and the old Viennese women, who owned the hotel, cooked wonderfully good clean food. And after eight days of the river boat's spotted table cloths, its plates washed in river water, and glasses not washed at all, one would have been well satisfied just to have rice without small stones in it. After one of the Viennese woman's meals, you feel pleased with yourself and the rest of the world, and are in that mood of benevolence you owe it to your hosts to acquire before setting out to try and describe their town.

A lot has happened since the first Indians chose this spot on the broad river bank on which to build their straw huts.

In 1660 the Portuguese built a fort here, and shortly afterwards the Jesuits followed and built a mission station. That was what always happened in those days.

In 1850 the town was still little more than a fort and a mission station, but then it was made the capital of the Amazon State, and changed its name from Villa de Barro de Rio Negro to the handier Manaus. This was a compliment to the tribe of Manaus Indians who had inhabited



that part before the white man came. It was not till the turn of the twentieth century that the town began to take proper shape. Then in almost no time it acquired a floating harbour and customs house, a town hall and palace of justice, and to crown them all the opera with its pink walls, white cornices and barbaric golden cupola that is topped by something that looks like an upturned tumbler. "Bottoms up" has always been Manaos' slogan.



Manaos is a quiet place now, and you will see more coffee cups than champagne glasses on the little tables of the "American Bar" when evening comes and the lamps hang nervously quivering above the streets. And the grass grows longer between the paving stones than becomes a town of this size.

The gilt is peeling off the cupola of the opera and off the holy pictures in the cathedral that crowns the top of a rise. It is approached by two ramps that encircle the zoological garden like a pair of arms. From the narrow cages and muddy pools of the zoo an acrid smell of beasts of prey reaches the nostrils of the faithful on their way to mass. The grunting of crocodiles and the screeching of herons mingles with the booming of the organ and the singing of the choir. That is how it should be—in Manaos.

The cathedral itself is a basilica. Its basic colours are yellow and brown, and it is decorated with an orgy of paper flowers.

To the right of the entrance they have made a little grotto, like the mausoleum of a noble family in a Danish country church. If you look in through its ingenuous grill, you see a sort of grand guignol scene that Madame Tussaud could not have bettered. A life-size effigy of



*Parrots screech in the gardens of Munaos' villas*



*And just beyond, in the jungle, orchids bloom*



Christ lies on a bier and behind it stands a life-size Virgin Mary. Both are made of dead white wax.

The Virgin Mary has torn her bleeding heart from her breast and holds it in one hand. The Christ has a crown of thorns. He is dead, but you can see that they have flogged him. Heavy drops of blood trickle from his forehead, breast and arms. But the blood runs horizontally down his arms. The artist who made the figure, presumably intended it to hang up, but it has been made to lie, and the effect is most peculiar.



Manaos had the ill-luck to flourish in an epoch when architecture was stagnant as never before. When money began streaming into the town and primitive people became millionaires over night and had to build themselves palaces and erect monuments to show the world how rich they were, neither the Old nor the New World had anything worth imitating. Everything was in a state of flux. The big houses built elsewhere in the world at the end of the 19th century and in the first decade of the 20th bear witness to that. It was the period that gave us desolate railway towns and our large town houses with a multitude of spires and stucco.

Manaos became the horror of all horrors. Its streets were lined with allotment sheds enlarged to meet the needs of millionaires and made of imperishable material. Apart from a few pompous government buildings erected later, there are scarcely two houses in Manaos owing their shape to a recognized style, and no two houses are alike. Each tries to outdo the other. Never have I seen so many miniature statues placed in so many unnecessary places. Here is bad taste run amok.



There are two fountains in front of the cathedral, two gigantic table centre-pieces. The one's basin is borne by



four griffins grown together, the other's by four women similarly unnaturally joined. Both are flanked by darling children spouting water both here and there, and are surmounted by a naked woman holding an unshaded 100 watt electric light bulb high above her head. And they are all, griffins children, basin and women, painted the colour of spinach.



The people who created Manaos were adventurers who, perhaps, knew neither the alphabet nor the Lord's Prayer, but they knew how to make money out of rubber. They represented practically every nation in the world, and each gave conscious or unconscious expression to his homesickness in the house he built himself. That is why you can see Turkish minarets, Grecian temples, German baronial castles, Swiss chalets, English Tudor houses, American colonial style and Portuguese tiled facades, without even leaving the main street. What a strange mixture is here of servants' hall taste, the pride of the parvenu, and home-sickness. Now that they are all dilapidated with the stucco falling and the plaster peeling, the effect is doubly striking and tragic.

Manaos lies a thousand miles into the jungle, a monument to the ugliest of all architectural periods. If it should ever be over-grown and disappear as has happened to other towns in the jungle, the archaeologists who one day will find it again and excavate it will get a nervous shock.

Architecture, however, is not the only sphere in which Manaos has never progressed beyond the Victorian age. In spite of the tropical heat and the intolerable humidity of the atmosphere, people wear more black than in the towns of southern Brazil. Prudery still triumphs and a young girl cannot move unless accompanied by a

chaperon. The people's whole attitude to life is half a century behind.

Having already said that the poverty to be found in the mud huts of the cabocles in Parana, Matto Grosso, and Minas Geraes, cries aloud to high heaven, I found myself vainly searching for words to describe the misery and destitution to be found among the outcasts of this large town on the Rio Negro.

I have a passion for cemeteries and covered-in market places. Manaus has a very large market a little way up a slope right above the river. Vultures sit like flies on the ridge of its roof and hop ungainly about the foul, stinking earth surrounding the building. Every now and again they scream hoarsely as they fight for a lump of bad meat.

This *Mercado* is the poor people's department store, where they can buy second-hand clothes, bad meat, cheap fish, and half-withered vegetables. There is a whole little town of shops under its roof, and in among them small, cheap restaurants. Each has its own specific smell and they all mingle into an acrid whole.

Manaos, not being on the beaten track of commerce, lacks the variety of goods to be found in the rest of Brazil. One of the restaurant-keepers had in an access of *galgenhumor* hung a placard on the wall above his counter on which he had written "Nao tem nada!"—We haven't a thing!

Outside the Mercado gaudy summer dresses and blue overalls dangle on hangers in the breeze. A seething horde of poor people goes from booth to booth pawing the goods, haggling over the price, irresolute, lean and sad.



Down the slope in front of the Mercado, on the stinking greasy river bank you will find the really poor, those who do not count: apathetic, diseased, starved men and women who have been written off, the last of the thousands of rubber workers who were stranded here when the rubber boom came to its sudden end before the first world war, without even the money for a ticket on the cheapest river boat to take them away.

The only thing they still possess is the faculty to reproduce themselves. In the mud and black water that comes streaming down the slope from the Mercado and the drains, little children play among the vultures.



In this No Man's Land of poverty down by the river, you will find two kinds of human habitation. In the shallows, leaky old lighters lie side by side. They have a roof of palm leaves open at either end. Boats that are no longer fit to sail, end their days here as homes. In them children are born, and in them they grow up. On the river bank are primitive palm huts, the most wretched I have seen anywhere: just a rickety skeleton of bamboo scantily covered with leaves. Between these huts lie heaps of refuse thrown down over the slope from the market halls above. And here people live and die too, without having seen anything of the world but that wretchedness. Sewer slime seeps into the palm huts, clings between the toes of the bare-footed grown-ups and cakes on the bare bodies and faces of the children. Everywhere it collects in large stinking puddles where the malarial mosquito can breed in the best possible conditions.

It is from here that come all the beggars, who haunt the broad *avenidas* of Manaus like a plague. When a boat comes in with foreigners or other fine people on

board, the police drive the beggars away, but towards evening they sneak back again and sit on steps or creep about the pavements on hands and knees, stretching out groping hands to passers-by. These are beggars of that most unpleasant kind who shamelessly bare running sores and thrust out inflamed stumps of limbs, exhibit empty infected eye-sockets, just as you are enjoying a sandwich and a glass of beer at a café table in the flickering light of the street lamps. And so you hasten to buy yourself free of the sight with a penny, unless you are lucky and a waiter or policeman comes and drives the tactless one away like a mangy dog.

Tactless? But then so am I in breaking the rules of hospitality by dragging this sort of thing into the lime-light. I should have gone with the friendly official who so badly wanted to show me the new gymnasium, the town's modern hospital, and its handsome palace of justice, for they, he said, were worth writing about. And so they are, only that I find it difficult to be impressed by the sight of nice sanitary drinking fountains with lion's heads in a marble paved school-yard, or to bow my head humbly when the bronze bells of the cathedral ring out over the town, so long as children are born and grow up among black pools of sewerage and have vultures for their playmates.

And so long as the priests guard the treasures in the cathedral crypt like dragons, so long as the diamond studded gold cross lies there in its burglar-proof safe, I shall never be able to understand how poor people can be suffered to creep humbly on their knees up hard stone steps in order to expiate their sins and light candles in front of a gilt picture of a saint, how the church can take



their money for the candle and out of the collection box and add it to the other possessions it never uses.

The devil alone knows why every single one of those damned souls in the mud isn't a rabid communist and why they don't band together, break down the cathedral doors and take the gold crosses and the silver chalices, the jewelled reliquaries, the embroidered altar cloths and every piece of velvet drapery that could make them a chemise or a coat. But they don't. Instead, they use the proceeds of their begging to buy red and green silk ribbons that bring luck, and tin amulettes that assure them the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

And it will be a long, long time before limp hands that make the sign of the cross at those ragged breasts, clench so that the knuckles show white.

When you, dear reader, come to your journey's end, you will find those of whom I write here in the places of the first. But visiting them now in their swamp, you can't help thinking that the price that has been paid for the raw rubber from the Amazon basin has been the most dreadful one of which you have ever heard.



## CHAPTER XIV

### *The Jungle Round the Town*

THEY tell a tale in Manaos of a tourist who went to the Governor of Amazon State and enquired to whom he should apply for permission to shoot a jaguar.

"I can give you that," said the Governor, "it costs 25s."

"And where shall I be able to get a shot at one?" asked the tourist.

The Governor drew him across to the window and pointed down into the street.

"Do you see that tram there? Take that for four blocks, then change into a No. 4. When you reach the terminus, get out and wait till the tram has gone again. Then, when all is quite quiet, you had better start looking out in case a jaguar wants to have a shot at getting you."

Such is Manaos.

It lies right in the jungle. Snakes crawl about the back gardens of the houses in the suburbs, and at night, monkeys come and eat the fruit. Ant-eaters sniff about the doorsteps, and small rodents attack the trees. Yet in the centre of the town you will find the largest opera house in South America.

There isn't a road or a railway linking Manaos with the outside world. The jungle extends sovereign on every side. It is a town without its like anywhere in the world.



That story of the tourist and the jaguar is, of course, a bit exaggerated. The noise of our civilization drives all large wild animals away, and to find Indians, crocodiles and jaguars, you must go several days' journey up the rivers into the thick wilderness, or along the banks of the small tributaries up which no steamers go. Yet the jungle itself and its teeming life of small mammals, birds, lesser reptiles and insects, is as untouched five minutes away from the tram terminus outside Manaus as it is twenty-four days' sail up the Rio Branco.

But, perhaps you would like to go for a trip in the jungle?

I have never been able to stand jungles after trudging about the virgin forest of Panama fourteen years ago. Since then my roving irregular existence has occasionally led me into situations where I have been forced to get into long boots and gird on a machete; but let me be honest and admit that I have never done so for pleasure. It is not that I am afraid of the jungle. I was the first time. Ye gods, how afraid I was! I could hear my heart thumping, for I was expecting the fearful creatures of a Tarzan film to spring silently at me from behind every large tree, and believed every creeper to be a camouflaged snake.

Since then I have discovered that the jungle is just sweat and thorns, fallen rotting trees, myriads of mosquitoes and legions of ants, bugs and other revolting little creatures whose bite itches for days or which jump down from branches on to the skin on your neck, burrow right into it and then drink themselves so full of your blood that they can't be taken out, and if you don't take them out you get large abscesses on your neck.

No heat is so dreadful as that under the jungle's thick



roof of leaves which never allows the damp to escape. It hangs in the air between the trees like a turkish bath, makes you feel suffocated, and gives you an appalling headache when the thermometer stands at 108 degrees in the shade. Your clothing clings to your body. Perspiration makes your eyes smart, and the strap of your wrist-watch digs a furrow in your softened skin. Your whole body is covered with the smarting, itching red prickles of heat rash. You are constantly thirsty, for the sweat runs off endlessly, pint after pint, day and night, and the temperature is always the same.

You must take wide circles round oozing swamps, fight savagely with lianas as thin and strong as piano wires that you cannot see until they are cutting into your neck or have tripped you up and you have fallen with both hands into an ant-heap whose swarming inhabitants react with bites that feel as though hundreds of needles had been jabbed simultaneously into your fore-arm.

You button your heavy khaki shirt tight round your wrists, cursing your forgetfulness in not taking thick gloves with you. You lace your high boots tighter round your riding breeches and turn up your collar as far as it will go, thinking bitterly the while of the illustrations in magazines which show the hero forcing his way through jungle in shorts and a thin white short-sleeved shirt that hasn't so much as a crease or a spot. Just let me have one of those heroes for half an hour in real jungle and I bet he would be blubbering like a child.

And how I would like to see a naked Tarzan swinging along from branch to branch with triumphant cries. In real jungle, he would change his tune quick enough when the mosquitoes attacked him or when his manicured





fingers caught hold of a branch of a young kapok tree which is thickly studded with thorns.

Those who long for the romance of the jungle will do best to continue enjoying Edgar Rice Burrough's candied version of it from the comfort of a seat in a cinema. That is much more exciting and decorative than the real thing. But, of course, they won't believe me. I have only floundered about the jungles of Panama, the New Hebrides, New Guinea, and now the Amazon, and that won't convince those who have followed Tarzan through scores of films.

All this bitterness just because one day a sense of my duty to my readers came over me and although I knew it all before, I girded on a machete, filled my water bottle with unsweetened lemon juice and told Sorensen that I was ready.

Hans Sorensen is a Dane. He began life by studying agriculture, and now he is a rubber expert loaned to Brazil by the U.S. Government. Never in his wildest dreams would he have thought of taking a trip into the jungle on a Sunday unless there was a job to be done, but there was. I was pestering him and he had promised three American soldiers to show them the tropical jungle. The Americans were merely out for adventure—they still believed in Tarzan—but he was to show me rubber being produced in the true, primitive way, for the Indians still employ the method used by their ancestors when the first white men saw them manufacturing the sap of the *Hevea brasiliensis*.

We started early in the morning while heavy rain clouds lumbered across the sky. To begin with we followed the river bank, walking over mud into which my feet sank deeply. You see, I am no longer a light-



weight, and also I was bowed under forty or fifty pounds weight of film equipment.

And then the rain came. We began to run. For almost a mile we ran through mud that reached our ankles in order to shelter in a hut built by the lumbermen on the bank. Before we reached it, I had jabbed a toe under a mangrove root and measured my length in the black clinging mud. Then we reached the hut, but why we should have sheltered there when we were already as wet as it is possible to be, I don't know.

When the squall was past we plunged into the jungle at right angles to the river. In the first couple of miles we got a good picture of the work of the lumbermen. They had felled every large tree. There is a great demand for the timbers of the Amazon jungle which command high prices. Some are as hard as iron, others as soft as cork. There are trees that insects never attack, and others that have a truly beautiful grain like the peacock's-eye tree. There is the rosewood tree that yields balsamic oils, and trees whose roots contain a poison that instantly kills insects and other cold-blooded animals. All these the lumbermen were busy turning into money for their white employers.

They had made a wicked mess. Tree trunks lay in every direction. From the cut surfaces of the pau brazil, whose glowing red wood has given the whole country its name, sap dripped and dripped. It looked like blood. The tree had all the clear colours of a sunrise.

We had to clamber and jump over the trunks. This was great fun, especially as the rain had made the ground squelchy and the trunks as slippery as an eel's skin. Some of the trees were rotten inside, for all that they looked sound enough. How we laughed when we



jumped on to one like that and both our feet went right through the treacherous bark! It was hellish hot and not a breath of air stirring.

In the end we were done with hurdling and came into jungle where the trees stood upright. Sorensen chatted as we walked along. He had been surprised, he told us, to see how many bushmasters there were in the jungle. I inquired whether a bushmaster was a kind of foreman or overseer in charge of the lumbermen; but Sorensen said that it was a snake usually seven to ten feet long, but it could even grow to over sixteen feet.

Was it poisonous? It was. Its bite killed you almost instantaneously.

When he first came to Manaos, there were scarcely any to be seen. But when, being interested in forestry, he had gone to inspect the lumbermen's work, he had discovered numbers of bushmasters creeping from their hiding places under fallen branches and leaves to escape the axe strokes of the lumbermen. In clearing that part of the jungle through which we had just come, they had lost sixteen men killed by bushmasters. Another 43 of the 250 men employed there had contracted malaria, and of these, six had died. The others would never recover properly.

As we worked our way along, Sorensen chattered on, entertaining us with a description of a walk through the woods of dear old Denmark in May when the beech is out in green leaves, a walk that turns into a picnic with half a chicken each and a bottle of *schnaps* that is laid in an ice-cold babbling brook to cool. It was so nice hearing about that as we struggled to get past the lianas, some of which were like the wire used to cut cheese, others equipped with small, unobtrusive thorns. Some of

those thorns were as long as needles and as hard as steel. I had to stop for a moment to pull fourteen of them out of my right leg. Sorensen said that he didn't think they were the poisonous kind.

The three Americans had long since reached the conclusion that it was a good thing they had fought the war in an office in Washington and not in the jungles of New Guinea.

One of them who had forgotten to bring his water bottle was gasping with thirst. Just as I was about to unfasten my water bottle to give him a drink the Indian lad who was acting as our guide said what presumably corresponded to: "One moment, sir," and took a few steps to one side. There he began hacking with his machete at what to me looked like a moss-grown boa constrictor, but which proved to be a liana as thick as Joe Louis' arm. When the liana was cut, the Indian summoned the American, who held his cupped hands beneath the cut, and let them fill full of the purest coolest water. When his thirst was quenched, water was still dripping from the cut, so I tasted it. It was delicious: pure, cold water without any tang whatsoever.

If you know the jungle's secrets, you can live there like a king. But if you don't know them, you can die of thirst and hunger in the midst of its tropical luxury.

The water bearing liana is very common. However, there are other kinds, exactly like it, whose sap is deadly poisonous, for it contains strychnine, which the Indians use in the preparation of their curare.

We walked on. Sometimes we had to get down on our bellies and crawl under a curtain of thorny lianas; at others, we had to make long detours to avoid a patch of impenetrable undergrowth. It began to pour again. The





rain drummed on the roof of thick leaves above us, and gushed down in places as from a gutter. The ground was greasy with rotten leaves and we were constantly slipping.

As always, the jungle was of a monotonous dark green, and it was stiflingly sultry. There were no flowers except for an occasional orchid high up in a tree, and, of course, we saw no animals. Even the stupidest creature would hurry away the moment it heard the branches cracking under our clumsy feet. Now and again we would hear the irritated, startled squeal of an ape and the crackling screech of a parrot. A single bird flashed by in front of us; a lovely bird with a rust-red back, lemon-coloured wings, chrome yellow beak, black head and breast, and red legs. Against the dismal dirty green of the jungle, it was like a multi-coloured rocket in a grey evening sky.

When we had gone four miles in this fashion, the Americans had already lost their childish belief in Tarzan and his wonderful jungle life, and were beginning to ask if we had a long way to go to get back.

"Ask the boy," suggested Sorensen.

The Indian lad, who understood a tiny bit of English, nodded and smiled when one of the Americans asked him if it was a long way, and when asked if it would take several hours yet, he nodded just as eagerly and told him "Yes" with a grin as broad as before. Yet I had my suspicions.

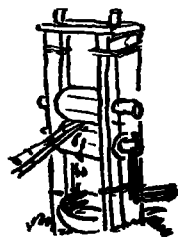


The seed of those suspicions was sown many years ago in the Solomon Islands. I had had a Kanak from a mission station as my guide on a similar trip, and whenever I asked if we would be there in ten minutes, he always nodded eagerly and with just such a broad grin, and said "Yes." As a rule, natives are always polite to

the white man, whom they treat with the same friendly indulgence as we do a little puppy that hasn't yet stopped tripping over its own feet. And they don't like to grieve a guest with a negative answer to one of his questions. After all, both time and distance can be called relative conceptions; just ask an Indian lad, or Einstein.

Half an hour later we stepped out into a little clearing. A long-haired reddish brown pig was grunting among the roots of the trees at the edge of the jungle. There was a hut and round about it grew a couple of orange and lemon trees, a patch of sugar cane, some saffron bushes whose rust-red pods are used to give the eternal rice a little colour and taste, a few beans, some manioc roots, and a large cupuassu tree, whose tasty brown fruit that is as soft as suede, is mother to the cultivated cacao.

In front of the hut stood a home-made sugar press. It had two grooved rollers between which the canes are pressed; the juice drips down into a calabash and is then either used just as it is, or is evaporated over a fire and becomes crystal sugar. Not one nail had been used in making that press. Its parts were either dovetailed, or else bound together with strong lianas. It was a masterly bit of work carried out with the simplest of tools.



There were several women in the hut. One had an eight-month old child on her arm, and it was she who lived there, the wife of the rubber collector. The others were guests come to stay the night on their way to town, for them a journey of three days marching through the jungle.

Three other children were rolling about the floor, stark naked, playing with a mangy dog. The youngest, in its mother's arms, was pale and limp, its head lolling, its eyes strangely blank, its skin yellow. Congenital

malaria. In the head, said its mother. Perhaps it would live out the year, perhaps not.

We had a look at the hut while waiting for the rubber collector who was on his round tapping trees in the jungle. The children came shuffling up in embarrassment and offered us babassu fruits. We sucked the sweet flesh off the large stones and spat them out on to the floor where the dog tried to seize them, but the woman with the child kicked it away. It snarled. The poor brute was so mangy that it was almost bald. There were large open sores on its back and its eyes were inflamed.

Then the fleas found us.

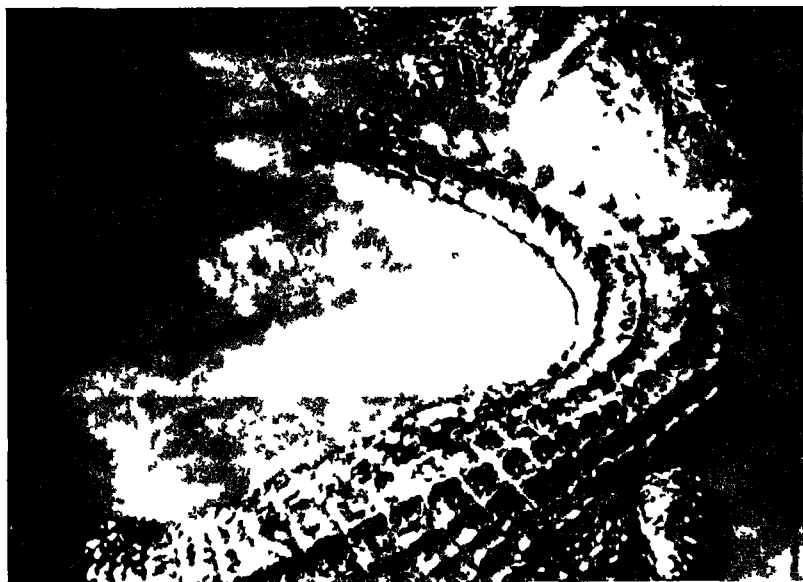
We were offered half a coconut shell filled with lukewarm, turgid water. If only we had been able to refuse it, but of course, we couldn't. I am sure it was that drink which gave me the dysentery that three weeks later in Rio knocked me flat. A nice memento from the Amazon.



The master of this household, the rubber collector, was fairly well paid as pay goes in this country. There was a tremendous difference between his hut and the rickety hovels on the river bank at Manaus. He was by no means an outcast from society as those others were. He was active and efficient, always busy with his rubber trees, and had had energy enough to build himself a wooden house. This was raised on piles three feet off the ground and its insects. The floor was made of bits of palm, packed more or less closely together. The few windows were mere square holes without glass. They could be shut with palm leaf blinds to keep out the rain. Technically there were two rooms, though the smaller was really just a corner separated from the rest by some screens. It was a dark corner without a window and



Primitive balls of raw rubber from native collectors



The two largest crocodiles lay dosing in the pool



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here the rubber collector, his wife and the youngest children slept in their hammocks. (Beds they had never heard of.) The older children, those who went out to work, and the sons and daughters-in-law, had to hang their hammocks all together in the larger room. There wasn't a chest or a cupboard in the house in which to put anything away. But then, no one had anything to put away. They had no other clothes than those they stood in. The family consisted of six daughters and two sons. It would not be long, however, before there would be only one son, as the second was the child with congenital malaria in the head. The wife was small and dreadfully thin. She never stopped coughing and spitting, and seemed to be in the last stage of consumption. She looked like a survivor from Belsen Concentration Camp.

A sort of veranda had been built outside the hut. It had a palm leaf roof, but no walls. The floor was of flat laths and thin stems, and it dipped and rustled as you walked across it. The gaps in it let you look down into a large, muddy pool where pigs grunted and ducks quacked, and through them rose the stench from the garbage which was thrown into it for the pigs and ducks, and from the excrement of the young children who used it as their lavatory. The place was alive with flies and here they had their kitchen.

The kitchen consisted of a primitive table made of planks. On this some large stones were piled to make a sort of fire-place on which they cooked their food in empty food tins, dented and rusty, brought all the long way from the refuse dump of the town. They stirred their food with a bit of stick and ate it with their fingers. Morning, afternoon and evening, their diet was the same: beans cooked with a bit of fish or bacon rind, or just



by themselves, mixed with boiled husked rice and farofa into a thick porridge. They had no plates, and they never washed. The whole family ate out of the same tin, dipping their fingers in turn one after the other. The tin would be washed in water from the river that ran past the hut on its way to the Rio Negro, and its muddy water was all they had to drink.

Appallingly unsanitary as are the conditions in which the Indians and those who work in the Amazon jungle live, yet man's desire for a little comfort, however primitive and desperate his conditions, cannot be denied even there. On the unplanned planks of the walls of that wretched hut was nailed a brightly coloured tear-off calendar with a picture of the Virgin Mary. Beside it hung a picture of an Admiral in full dress with three rows of glittering medals on his chest. It must have been torn from some illustrated magazine. Below this was a label printed in gold that once had graced a roll of linen. Then there were certificates to show that the two eldest children had been properly confirmed. The certificates were embellished with biblical pictures and quotations and on the dotted line left vacant in the printed text, the priest had written the child's name and a date. The ink had almost faded away.



There was one rickety table in the hut. Most of it was taken up by a wooden box. I carefully opened the lid, and got a shock. There, behind those rough boards, was a whole group of little figures painted in pure garish colours and bronze gilding, doll saints for a domestic altar. There were the Virgin Mary, Joseph, Saint Francis and Saint Sebastian. The colours were so bright and warm that they were like a shout in the gloomy, colour-

less dusk of the room. That little altar must have cost a fortune in terms of a rubber collector's income.

The woman walked across to the calendar and tore off the day's date. On the back of the leaf was printed a quotation from the bible. She held it out and asked me to read her the day's motto. It was "Blessed are the Simple."

Neither the rubber collector nor his wife were able to read or write; but Raymunda, their eldest daughter, had mastered the art. She was the family's chronicler and had clumsily pencilled the dates of the children's birth and confirmation on the planks of the wall beside the door. Here, too, they kept a sort of visitors' book. Their friends had run a pencil round their fingers to give a crude picture of the whole hand, and across the palm they had painstakingly scrawled their Christian names. Most have learned to do that much, for otherwise they have no right to vote; but that's as far as they get.



Two ancient rifles completed the decorations. They were soldered in several places and bound round with wire in others, but they were not there for decoration. The rifles gave the family all the variety they had in their menu: an occasional tapir or a wart-hog. I am not sure that I would ever have dared fire one of them, even if my life were at stake.

A muffled call sounded in the distance and was answered with a shrill screech from one of the children outside the hut. Machado and the eldest children were on their way back from their daily round.

We went down to the little river. It was completely covered in by the tops of the trees that turned it into a tunnel lined with broad leaves. A moment or two later a canoe came gliding into it. It slipped along on the

current without the least sound, through water that reflected the green sheen of the leafy roof. It was like looking into an empty green bottle, in whose glass sunlight was refracted.



In the prow of the canoe stood a calabash container in which Machado carried the day's harvest of latex, emptied from the tin cups that are hung beneath the cut in the bark. This white tough sap, the latex, will not keep for more than a few hours. Unless it is treated, it rots, which was why Machado and his son immediately set about preparing the process which would preserve it.

First, they lit a fire. Then, when it was well alight, they heaped it with the shells of wild Urucuri palm nuts. These contain so much oil that when slowly burned they emit exceptionally greasy smoke. As this began to billow up in thick yellowish grey clouds, the two men placed an old petrol tin with holes in the bottom and another for draught at the side over the reeking fire. Then, while the son with a palm leaf fanned the smoke in under the tin, his father poured the latex from the calabash into a flat wooden dish. It was as thick as clotted cream and as white as chalk. Then in one hand he took a branch some three feet long and in the other a scoop made of half a coconut. With this, he poured latex over the branch, twisted it round several times and thrust it into the smoke where he continued to twist it round and round until the white latex became a golden brown and had hardened into a film round the branch. And so it went on: layer after layer of fresh latex being added until the scoop was empty, by which time the rubber round the stick was about an inch thick.



This was now rubber that would keep. Day after day, Machado would add to it, until he had a giant ball of

rubber weighing forty or fifty pounds. Then it would be ready, and he would trundle it down to the little river and tow it to the nearest collecting centre where he would receive a handful of small coins for his labour.

At the collecting centre, his ball would be chained to hundreds of others and sent drifting down the river to the factory where the Indians' rubber receives the treatment necessary to enable it to compete in quality with plantation rubber.

There, the great heavy balls are sent through a succession of rolling mills that squeeze them flat and reduce them to long thin sheets, and the whole time they are sprayed with strong jets of water to remove the impurities in the raw rubber.

This jungle rubber is very impure. Insects and bits of leaves and twigs fall into the tin cups into which the latex runs, and remain sticking in it; and while it is being smoked a certain amount of dust and ash adheres to it. As a result, the quality is of the poorest and most uneven, but it is the age-old method and Sorensen had thought that I would be interested to see how the rubber collectors with whom I had sailed up the Amazon would have to work. It was most interesting, and the trip had cured the Americans of their Tarzan complex.

It was time to set out on the way back. There was not much day-light left and we had to be out of the jungle before darkness settled down on land and river at six o'clock. Machado's guests asked to be allowed to go with us. We said good-bye. The two women who were coming with us took their precious shoes from the nail where they had hung, and slung them round their necks by the laces. Not till we were well into the suburbs would they sit down on the edge of the ditch and put



those instruments of torture on their strong, broad feet, the soles of which were as hard as any leather. Then they would hobble on over the asphalt and cobbles, miserable but proud at being the possessors of real shoes like those of the elegant white women.

Sorensen took the lead; I followed, and after me came the Indian lad, the three Americans, and lastly, the two women.



As I was stepping over a tree trunk, lying right across the narrow path, I happened to look down straight at a black snake lying there coiled like a spring with head raised and tongue protruding.

How I took off will always remain a mystery. I had one leg lifted, straddling the trunk, but did it ever touch the ground, or did I take off from one leg? Or did my heart give such a leap inside me that it lifted my whole body straight up and over the trunk? The Americans maintained that I shot up into the air like a circus diver off a spring board, with my camera, tripod and all the rest of my equipment flying round my head. The Indian lad saw at once what had happened. Brandishing his machete, he jumped at a black tail that was about to disappear into the grass, but the blow never fell. When he saw the shape and colour of that tail he checked it, and gave a faint whistle through his teeth. I asked him what was up. But I knew. It was a bushmaster.

Naturally, I have seen snakes in many places, even though you don't come across them nearly as often as is popularly believed, but that was the first time I had straddled a bushmaster that was ready to strike. Perhaps it did strike? I cannot tell. Anyway, I luckily had my high boots on.

We walked on through the soaking jungle, leaves and lianas smacking us in the face. Sorensen was the sort of person who can always produce a story appropriate to the occasion, and he now told us how he had learned to keep his shirt collar buttoned up when in the jungle.

One day it had been intolerably hot and he had been walking with his collar open. Suddenly, he had felt something cold down his back. A snake had dropped from a tree and fallen between his shirt and his back. It turned and twisted long enough for him to grow very nervous, for, of course, he couldn't see what sort of snake it was. In the end, it got its head the right way up and poked it out by his shoulder for fresh air. Sorensen too was able to breathe more easily, for by squinting down he could see that the snake was as green as the verdigris on a copper roof and that meant that it was a harmless tree snake.



We reached the edge of the jungle as the sun went down. In front of us were the black waters of the Rio Negro. The sunset flamed up into the sky, setting the entire western heavens ablaze. Then the darkness fell. As we walked into the light of the first street lamps, by the tramway depot, fire-flies were flitting about the road and lights going up in the bungalows. Then we met some whites and they stared at us in amazement. They were wearing starched collars and black coats.

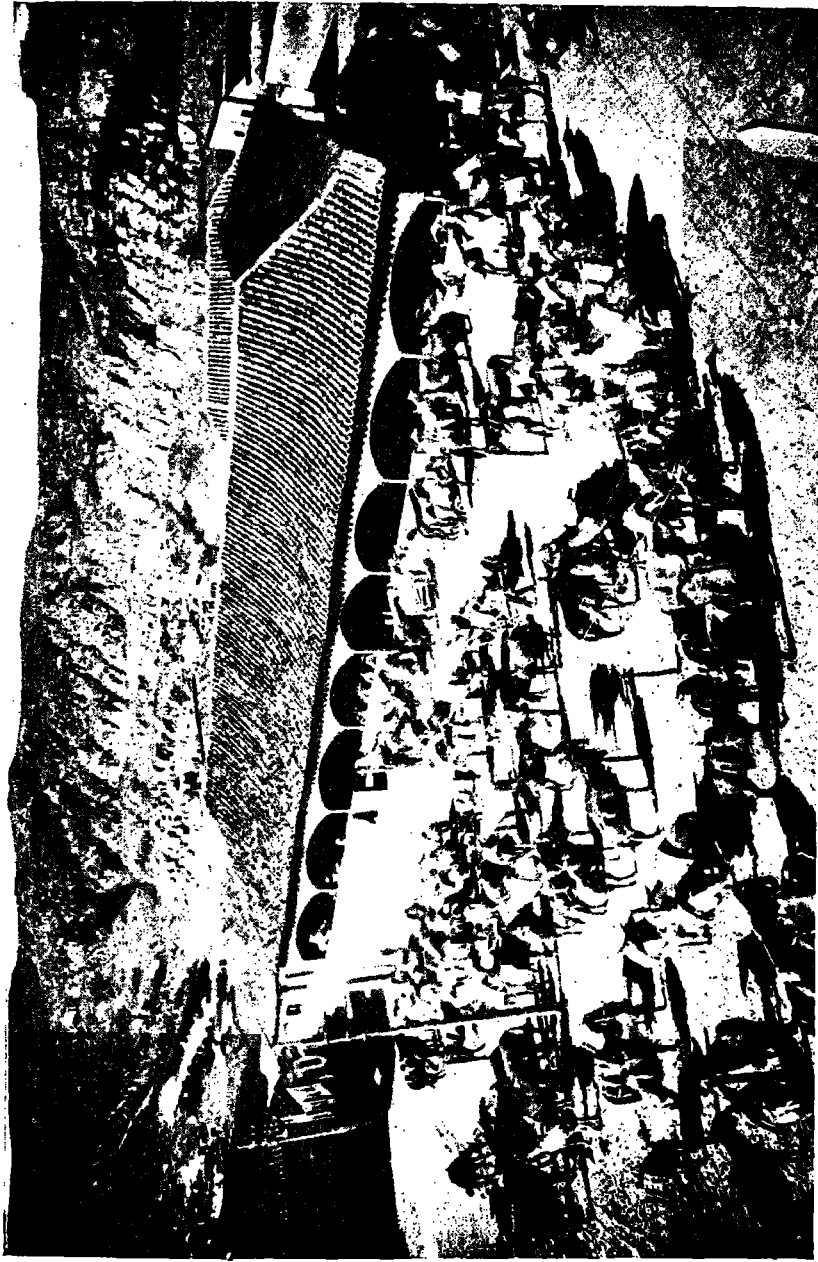
Many who had lived all their life in Manaus have never set foot in the jungle. Both there and in Belem I met people who had never seen a tapir. And a certain young lady who had been born and bred in a town a thousand miles deep in the jungle told me with a horrified



expression that a boa constrictor was one of the *worst* kinds of poisonous snake.

In Manaus the jungle is not a subject for polite conversation. It ranks with the poor outcasts on the river's banks.





Gauchos' mules tethered in the market place of Cuiaha, capital of Matto Grosso, the great cattle state



## CHAPTER XV

### *Big Game Hunting*

I WAS sitting in what the hotel proudly called its "hall," feeling pleased with myself.

I had, so to speak, reached my journey's end. I had conscientiously tried to describe the Amazon from a variety of angles and had not forgotten the little digressions away from my own modest experiences that are needed to give a brief account of the history and geography of those parts and to say something about the ups and downs of rubber and of the way the Indians live. In spite of having promised myself that I would waste little time on the "green hell" stuff, I had been forced into making a trip in that hell itself. Taking it all in all, I was quite satisfied with myself, and had the nice comfy feeling that only that can give.

I had my ticket for the journey home. Packing was merely a question of a few minutes. The cigarette was good and the soda-water ice-cold. Then the waitress came with a letter. An air mail letter from Denmark. It was from my son, who is eleven, and called Jorgen.

I could see that he had taken a lot of pains, and I bet he had sat at my desk which is taboo when I am at home, and that his tongue had been bulging out his cheek as he wrote:—

"Dear Father,

Thanks for all your letters, they are very exciting. We are having a good time and Bobby has bitten a



dog called Teddy, and Inger and Lilla have been to a birthday party, but why do you never write anything about crocodiles?

Our school-mistress says that as you are on the Amazon, you must see lots of crocodiles. I can't write more now because I am busy. Lots of love from your son, Jorgen."

There is nothing that pains a travelling writer more than to receive letters of complaint from his readers. And the worst of it was that the boy was right. His letter conjured up a picture of scores of other complaints piling up on my desk after my return home.

"You write about moonlight and parrots and Indians and dirty tablecloths and rubber and all sorts of other things—but what about the crocodiles?"

I summoned the chambermaid.

"Where can you find crocodiles about here? Many crocodiles? I need crocodiles both for my articles and for my coloured film!"

"Jacares?"

"Sim, Certamente, Jacares. Muito jacares. Jacares grande e pequeno!"

She disappeared, quite bewildered.

A moment later she was back again accompanied by the landlady and the cook.

"O Senhor quere jacares?"

"Sim, Senhora. Muito jacares."

"Jamen, Senhor, but you can't get it here. It is only the Indians and cabocles who eat crocodile. But we have roast beef to-day, lovely roast beef."

I explained that that was not quite what I had meant, that I wanted to know which was the nearest place where I could find a lot of crocodiles to write about and to film;



but I might just as well have asked for a slice of the moon. She had never heard of crocodiles in the neighbourhood of Manaos. She knew that such animals existed, and had even seen photographs of them. In fact, she had a bag of crocodile skin. But that was the extent of her knowledge of them.

"Is there no one in this town," I asked, "who knows about crocodiles? Can't you tell me where I am most likely to find out about them. It is most important. My reputation may depend on this."

All she could suggest was that I should go and ask the harbour authorities.

I was received by a short young man who looked as though he owned the Amazon and all that lived on and in it. And he wouldn't even listen to what I had to say. All that interested him was whether I could produce letters of introduction from various high-placed officials in Rio. He was the sort of person who might well have said, "We have no crocodiles here, my good man. You seem to forget that you are in a highly cultured society. Have you seen our new hospital and the high school? If not, I will gladly show you them."

Nothing to be done with him.

As I was walking away from him I saw a door on which was written "Directorate for Hunting and Fishing," but the director was away and wouldn't be back for a couple of months. He had flown to Rio. Anyway, as the young woman told me, crocodiles didn't come under his department, so there was no point in waiting.

After that, I wandered aimlessly about the streets, till suddenly I saw a sign over a row of office windows—"Crocodile skins bought at highest prices." I went up the steps three at a time and got hold of the chief himself,



a gigantic Uruguaian, Senhor Ardouini. What he didn't know about crocodiles wasn't worth knowing.

"It is too late now," he said. "At this time of the year, the river rises and the water goes up into the shallow lakes and lagoons where the crocodiles live. The season is over and hunting has stopped. But if you are to be here in the winter and have the time, it will be a pleasure to take you with me on a buying trip up the river. At the present time, I could of course take you in a motor-boat a day or two up the Rio Negro and you might be lucky enough to see one or two, but they would merely be small fry, three feet long or less. They would look like lizards on your film, if you could ever get near enough for them to show on the picture at all. There just are no others so close to the town."

"If I understood aright, Senhor Ardouini, you said that these lizards could be found a *short* distance from the town? How fast is your motor-boat?"

"Twelve knots. But of course we should only sail during daylight."

"Would you be kind enough to tell me how long it would take to reach a place where there is a chance of finding large crocodiles?"

"Let's say twelve or fourteen days. But as I told you, it isn't the season now. You must wait till well on in the winter—in May, June and July. You can find them in the shallow places right into September. I am sorry not to be able to help you. It would be very nice—for us as well—if we could just go down to the harbour and get our crocodiles there. But it is the same with crocodiles as with the Indians. As civilization advances, they disappear. They are exterminated to a certain extent, but it is mostly due to their withdrawing from the scene.

Did you see a single crocodile in the thousand miles you sailed from Belem to Manaus?"

I had to admit that I hadn't.

"They have disappeared. They don't like steamboats. They have crept up the tributaries and into the lagoons. That's where you have to look for them now.

"And things aren't made any better by the enormous increase in the demand for crocodile skins that has occurred in recent years. We can sell every skin we can dress. Most go to the Argentine for further processing. We still haven't factories here than can take the horn out of the skins and make them soft and pliant. The Argentinians learned that from the Germans. But it won't be long before we can do that for ourselves.

"When I tell you that the State of Amazonas—that is to say mainly from our tannery which is the largest up here—exported one million crocodile skins in the last two years, you will realize how their numbers must have thinned in the immediate neighbourhood. The hunters have to go farther and farther afield to find the brutes. At the moment, they get from 15s. to 25s. a skin. They have never fetched as much before. So you see, it isn't only the steamers that keep the crocodiles away from Manaus.

"Unless you can't wait till the winter, and can set aside at least a month for the trip, then I'm afraid you won't find the crocodiles you want for your film.

"However, if it would amuse you and you care to come down to the harbour early to-morrow morning at eight, I will take you out to our tannery where you will see how crocodile skins are dressed. The skin is always something. . . ."







The motor-boat was there at the time agreed. Ardouini himself sat in the stern, proud and majestic, with a cigar eight inches long protruding from one corner of his mouth. We turned up stream and past the suburbs of Manaos, twisting and turning among a confusion of canoes on their way to the market with earthenware jars, manioc root, sugar-cane, bananas, peas, and small black pigs. The bank was lined with women standing in the water almost up to their waists; the town's washer-women already at their day's work. With mighty flourishes of their arms, and much laughter, they swung the clothes in wide arcs, smacked them down on stones by the bank and belaboured them with stout cudgels; then they would turn to pounding and rubbing them against the rough surface of the stone. I turned my head away and sighed. Just the night before, I had sent my shirts and tropical suits to be washed.

A good distance beyond the town, we ran alongside a quay with a slipway. Up on the slope was a big two-storied building with a large sign running across its front to inform us that here was Ardouini's tannery: "Cortume Crocodilo Limitada." As we walked up the slipway, I realized why Ardouini had set up so far from the town. The smell, to put it very mildly, was unpleasant.

We entered a large hall some 250 feet long and 60 feet broad with other large rooms leading off from it. This was the main hall where most of the work was done. Here were huge piles of salted, raw crocodile skins graded according to size. A couple of hundred workmen, mostly of mixed Indian blood, were busy dragging skins out of the piles and cutting them into suitable pieces. After that they were put in tanning baths and rotating drums where they received the first treatment.

Outside, in the yard, were covered racks in which recent skins brought in were hung up to dry. That was the first thing to be done after the canoes that come up from the small rivers had brought their stinking cargoes to the slipway.

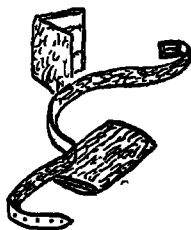
In the rooms off the main hall, sat men bowed over whirling rollers of steel or of carborundum. These were experimenting with methods of finishing the skins. At that time "Cortume Crocodilo" itself only used the third grade. These they polished and cut until they could be made into pocket books, cigarette cases and belts, splendid souvenirs that are in great demand in all parts of Brazil, for no self-respecting sailor will go back to Liverpool or Sandefjord without a belt made from a crocodile he himself has shot.

It is the crocodiles of medium size, those about six feet in length, whose skins are used for manufacture. The big ones are too coarse and their armour too hard, while the small ones can only be stuffed. Even they are a great attraction in the souvenir shops of the Avenida Rio Branco in Rio.

The largest crocodile ever brought to the tannery measured 16 feet 2 inches. They don't grow much bigger in the Amazon country, or at any rate Ardouini was inclined to regard reports of monsters 25 feet and more as the fabrications of over-heated imaginations.

The rough salted skins are cut into strips, packed into cases, and sent direct to Buenos Ayres. What is left, the odds and ends and damaged pieces, are thrown into trolleys and wheeled outside and tipped in large boilers, where they are turned into an excellent joiner's glue.

I walked round making notes and taking photographs, but the more crocodile skins I saw, the lower sank my



spirits. This was the end of the story—would I ever get photographs of its beginning? Would I ever see them being surprised, lassoed, killed and skinned? If not. . .

If my son hadn't written that letter, I don't suppose I should ever have thought of it.

When the idea came to me, I drew Ardouini aside and explained it. He just gazed at me, blinked, then he slapped his thighs and grinned all over his face, and dealt me a slap on the shoulder that nearly knocked me over.

"You can count on my help, Senhor. And my entire business is at your disposal."



The director of the Zoological Gardens in Manaus was a nice, serious youngish man. He looked up from his desk which was littered with monkeys' skulls, butterflies on pins, newspapers and family photographs, and politely inquired what he could do for us.

"We would like to buy your largest crocodile," I said.

He shot up in his chair and took a firm grip of the edge of his desk. At that moment, there was a look in his eye such I can imagine in a bishop's on receiving a request from the Secretary of the Young Atheists Association for permission to use his cathedral for a New Year's Eve Ball. When he had collected himself, he pulled out a cigarette case and offered us cigarettes. Then he gave a guffaw that made the monkeys huddle together in their cages outside his window, and I breathed more easily.

"Is it worth a drink?" he asked. "If so, I'll gladly give you one."

We were given one.

"As far as I am concerned, I would be more than glad to have you buy all three crocodiles we have here," said he. "I have long been sick and tired of them. They lie



stupine and stupidly staring, while we have to be constantly on the watch that the muddy water in their pool doesn't become a breeding ground for mosquitoes right in the centre of the town."

However, he wasn't the only one concerned. The Zoological Gardens and all in them were the property of the State, not of the State of Amazonas, but of the Federal Government in Rio 2700 miles from where we were. And he was very afraid that it would be an extremely long affair entailing much letter writing before the thing could be put through. However, he suggested that we might at least try some of the higher officials. As far as he was concerned, there was nothing against it. In fact, we would be doing him a service in removing one of his crocodiles, though he would prefer to see all three go.

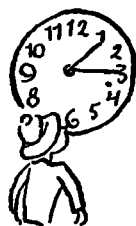
This was Saturday, and it was now a quarter-past-one. Every office shut at two o'clock, and my 'plane left Manaus at six o'clock the next morning. It would be a race against time.

We rushed into a huge office with a lofty ceiling, a colossal mahogany writing table and a valuable carpet. At the table sat two men in serious conversation. The door to the outer offices stood ajar and behind it all the young men we had brushed aside.

The two men at the table looked up in amazement and informed us that we had not been announced.

"I suppose I couldn't get permission to buy the large crocodile in the Zoo?" I asked, before they had time to say what they were thinking.

I had discovered a magic formula. Within a few seconds, the faces of the two men underwent a miraculous transformation from irritation to amazement, and from



amazement to amusement. They instantly forgot whatever serious problem it was that they had been discussing, as well as our impertinence in not letting ourselves be announced.

"Will you kindly repeat that question slowly and distinctly, please," said one of them, who looked as though he lived permanently in that office, "but not till I have summoned a few more of our colleagues."



A moment or two afterwards, I found myself sitting in a chair in the middle of a cluster of ten or more officials. Ardouini had withdrawn into the background, but then he was a citizen of the town and engaged in business there.

"Now, say that again, please," said the man in the chair at the table.

And so I explained my plan. It seemed to amuse them. I was no longer amused, for it was now half-past-one, and if anything were to be done it would have to be soon.

They held a council of war. The director of the Zoo was rung up. Then they had another council of war.

"This is a matter that *we* cannot decide. Perhaps the Governor could have taken a decision, but unfortunately, he is on his way to Rio. This is a very serious matter, seeing that it concerns the sale of State property. You might as well try to make me buy a gunboat. My advice is that you write to the Minister of . . ."

"One moment," said Ardouini emerging out of the background, "would it make things easier if the request were not for the sale, but for the *loan* of a crocodile? If we only borrowed the crocodile and gave it back before the Governor returned, how about that?"

They thought that over for a while. Two elderly men nodded.

"What would you do with it?" asked he who seemed to be the chief.

"Kill it," I said before I could stop myself.

"That won't do," said the chief. "That's not the way to borrow things. We can't have a dead crocodile lying in the pool making the water fouler than it is already."

Again, Ardouini came to my rescue.

"I undertake," he said, "to provide you with a prancing crocodile of the same shape and size within three months. Instead of an old, sour habitual criminal who has spent all his life behind bars, you will have a lively, gay brute straight from the river. It will become a favourite with the public in no time. The number of visitors will go up and the Zoo will show a profit. . . ."

The white-clad officials looked at each other. The two eldest nodded. Then the chief nodded too.

"That sounds acceptable. I think we might take the risk," said he, "go and get your crocodile!"

We heard no more, though just as I was streaking through the mahogany door I thought I heard one of the elderly officials saying that of course the Americans were quite crazy, but there was something rather refreshing in their way of doing things.

The cathedral's clock showed five minutes to two.

The Director of the Zoological Gardens was just putting on his hat.

"Well," he inquired, "what did they say? You didn't get it did you?"

"May we borrow your telephone—and the key to the crocodile's cage?" I asked.

"I must have it in writing," he said. "This is by no means a bad job, and I have a wife and children."

Ardouini had already dialled the number of the Governor's office. Ten minutes later a junior official came with a piece of paper that removed responsibility from the Director's shoulders. And a quarter of an hour after that a lorry arrived with experienced crocodile hunters from Ardouini's factory.



A watchman turned a key and the Zoo was shut. The rest was up to us.

The plan had sounded so simple when I had first propounded it, and now there we were with nothing to do but go in and get our crocodile. They were all three there: a young one, five or six feet long, and two broad-backed devils some thirteen feet long.

"We'd better take one of the big ones hadn't we?" asked Ardouini. "They will show up best in a picture."

I nodded.

"Come on, lads," said Ardouini, putting the key in the lock and opening the gate.

The crocodiles' cage was some 32 feet long and 17 feet broad, with a shallow cement pool in one corner filled with mud and water. This occupied about a third of the total space. In the centre of the cage grew a tree. The pool was in the corner furthest from the entrance. In it lay the small crocodile and one of the big ones. The other was lying on the edge with its tail in the water.

Telling about it now, it all sounds great fun, but at that moment I did not find it nearly as amusing as I had imagined it would be when I got the idea. It is one thing to catch a crocodile in the open where there is plenty of room for both sides, and quite another to try to do that

when you are confined with three of them in a space of ten square yards.

"Shut the door," said Ardouini. I did so with the utmost reluctance.

We took a step or two nearer the pool. Ardouini, the four crocodile hunters and I.

"Hum," said Ardouini.

"Gorrouff," said the crocodile lying on the edge of the pool.

"Oughtn't we to have brought a rifle or something with us?" I asked.

"We have ropes," replied Ardouini.

At that moment a lasso of plaited raw oxhide whirled across the cage and dropped over the big crocodile's extraordinarily evil-looking snout. It grunted, tossed its head and freed itself.

"It's a 'he'," whispered Ardouini. "Of course, the males are usually the more aggressive, but this one's lying just right for us."

Again the lasso swished down on that armoured snout. The crocodile shook its head, hissed and showed us a row of pointed, yellow teeth. The lasso slipped off again.

An ocelot in the next cage was running backwards and forwards in great excitement, and a little further on four monkeys were dancing up and down and working themselves into a gibbering frenzy.

The lasso was thrown a third time. The moment it landed on the snout, one of the cabocles leaped forward with a long pole to try to pull the noose down over the whole head; but before the pole had even touched the snout, the crocodile's jaws closed over it. There was a crunching noise and splinters flew all over the place, while the great brute's tail threshed the water in the pool





so violently that the mud spurted into my face and I had to put my hand quickly over the lens of my camera. With one jerk the crocodile twisted the pole right over and held it clamped as in a vice.

"Bravo, José," shouted Ardouini.

I couldn't see that there was anything to cheer about. The brute had destroyed a perfectly good pole and the lasso was still not over its head. But then I didn't know the technique.

The four hunters now got to work. With little jerks they tried to loop the lasso round the two ends of the pole sticking out on either side of the brute's jaws. I saw the idea. The lower and upper jaw were to be made fast to the pole. It would be no use just having the noose over the crocodile's head, as it only needed to open its jaw to loosen it. The brute still didn't suspect what they were up to, but just lay there holding on to the pole.

The other two crocodiles remained neutral. But they were soon jerked out of their torpor, for the male suddenly lashed out with its tail so violently that the water was whipped into foam; then it slid down into the pool, where it turned over on its back, threshing wildly, and tried to make the lasso slip off.

Those who have only seen crocodiles sleepily dozing in Zoos can have no conception of the lightning speed at which they can move when they like. In a moment, the great brute had emptied the basin of water and mud which cascaded out through the bars and over our clothes. But the lasso still remained fixed tightly round the pole, with two cabocles hanging on to its end.

The crocodile's yellow eyes glowed wickedly and I realized that it was looking straight at me.

"Take a turn round the tree," said Ardouini, and the two little cabocles had the lasso round the tree in a moment, and held on fast.

"Now he's coming," shouted one of the cabocles who was standing outside the cage trying with a long stake to get more of the lasso coiled round the brute's snout.

And he came.

He was out of the pool in an instant and roaring furiously, made straight for us. We jumped like cockroaches for the door, up the bars, away from the pool, the stench of musk from which was almost suffocating us.

But the two cabocles pulled in the slack round the tree and in the end, with a mighty jerk, got the whole head pulled tight against it. Now it was only the tail that was dangerous. But that's what crocodiles use to kill their victims and to sweep them into the water. And that tail threshed the ground making stones and gravel fly out on all sides, and the whole tree shook.

But we were a step forward.

The other two Indians carefully approached the tail. With a quick throw a second lasso dropped over the tip of the tail and a violent jerk tightened the noose round it. The tail hammered the ground, but with help the two cabocles got it under control and made the brute's other dangerous weapon harmless.

Meanwhile, the other two crocodiles had been lying peacefully at the other end of the pool, taking not the least interest in what was going on.

"Isn't that a shabby trick," said Ardouini disgustedly, "this old brute is married to her, but she won't so much as lift a paw to help him. Well, perhaps they had been married a long time."





The male just lay there, hissing if anyone came too close. There wasn't so much as a crocodile tear in its nasty yellow eyes.

Then the little one crawled nimbly up beside him.

"It's a young female," said Ardouini, with a significant shake of his head.

It was not so difficult to tie up the crocodile's fore and back legs so that it could not extend them. Four men had hold of the lasso round its tail and two were hanging on to that round the tree. Then Ardouini had them pass a long pole through the lasso round its head and down through that round the tail.

"That's how you catch crocodiles," he said. "Some people shoot them, others harpoon them; but this is a more sporting way. It does give the brute a chance!"

"There, Senhor. Your crocodile!"

The brute weighed about 36 stone and was somewhere between 35 and 40 years old. Then we carried it out of the Zoo. As their arch-enemy was borne past the monkeys' cage, they all screeched in senseless fear, shook the bars and danced up and down.

Quite a crowd had collected on the pavement, so this cannot have been an every day occurrence in Manaus. Looking as innocent as we could, we loaded the crocodile into the waiting lorry and drove down to the river. There we tipped the great brute into a canoe, hitched it to a motor-boat and chugged away up to Ardouini's factory. On the way, we passed the *M.S. Virginia* getting ready for the trip back to Belem. The steward was standing by the rail chatting with the Captain. I called out to them. Never will I forget the expression on their faces when they looked down and saw what lay beneath them.

We dragged the crocodile up the slope in front of

"Cortume Crocodilo Limitada." I found a spot with one or two trees, a few bushes and tall grass that looked nice and wild. If I kept the camera pointing down, I would easily avoid getting the factory chimneys in the background and no one would ever dream that it was only five minutes by car from the Opera House in Manaus.



Then Ardouini deployed his troops; a line of them beside me, a chain of outposts along the river bank, all armed with spurs, clubs and axes. I wound up the camera, straddled my shaking legs, and nodded to Ardouini.

"Let it loose," roared he, taking a good grip of his axe.

Two cabocles crept out to the crocodile and began loosening its thongs. It remained quite quiet. With a long pole they removed the lasso from round its snout. It didn't do a thing. Then the other lasso was slipped off its tail. The crocodile was now quite free. I was all ready to take my sensational pictures of a crocodile being caught in the jungle, but it looked as though my prima donna was not in the mood.

One of the cabocles gave it a poke in the side with his pole. Nothing happened. Then he jabbed the pole in among the brute's teeth. That brought it to life!

It gave a furious slash with its tail that scattered the cabocles and sent them scampering up the slope. Then it shook its head, raised itself up till all four legs were straight, and before I had time to press the release stop, it shot forward like a race-horse lashing its tail and grunting like a raging boar. The next moment, I received a mighty blow on the shins that sent me hurtling head first into a mud pool in which I landed with both hands stretched above my head.



*Now* its coming, I thought; but it didn't. When in a tight corner a crocodile never deviates from the direct course to the safety of water. I could hear howls and shrieks and furious curses all mixed up with the frantic roars of the crocodile.

Wiping the mud from my eyes, I looked down towards the river. The crocodile had got safely through the first line and was now making straight for our reserves, paying no attention to the danger threatening it on either side. A spear swished through the air and just missed it. The nearest hunter leaped forward as agilely as a polecat and plunged his harpoon down into the brute's broad, grey-green back, but the point merely rebounded off the armour, and the man only just avoided a fearful blow from the crocodile's threshing tail.

Ardouini had abandoned Portuguese and gone back to his childhood's Castillian. Every word he said about that crocodile will cost him another six months in purgatory.

I picked my camera out of the mud. It was still whirling, so I *had* pressed the release stop. However, it could only have recorded my trip through the air into the pool and then some close-ups of Rio Negro mud.

"All that effort for nothing," said Ardouini bitterly. Then, through clenched teeth he added: "We'll get the other crocodile on Monday."

"On Monday morning, at six o'clock, I shall be sitting in the 'plane for Rio," said I. "But I can at least sit there and hold my head up, for now I can look my son in the face when I reach home."

"Muito ben!" said Ardouini. "If you are satisfied, so am I."

"And will you tell me what this affair is going to cost," I asked.

"Don't mention that," replied Ardouini. "We give fifteen shillings for a crocodile's skin, so a live one won't cost so much as they won't have the work of skinning it. The hunters work for the factory and get their pay whatever happens. You can stand me a drink if I ever come to Denmark. Now I think I'll go home and tell the kids not to go into the water to-morrow, at least not in the Rio Negro."



## CHAPTER XVI

### *Farewell to the Amazon*

DESPITE its busy pavement cafés, luxury motor-cars and cinemas, I did occasionally get an uncomfortable feeling that somehow all was not right with the town.



Finer cupolas than that of the opera house have been raised above jungles and ended as the haunt of howling monkeys. More magnificent buildings than the Palace of Justice and the new Seminarium have gazed out into tropical nights through empty windows, like eyes in a skull. Richer towns have been abandoned by their inhabitants.

If you look at Manaus through the spectacles of history, you see the shadows of Boro-Budor and of the mysterious statues on Easter Island, and beside them the ghost towns in the abandoned gold mining districts of North America.

Is that the fate that awaits this town set in the heart of the jungle?

The thought was continually with me after one day my way had led me a short distance into the jungle outside the town, where on the bank of the river I saw what fifty years previously had been a flourishing colony.

Some priests had settled in a clearing there, built a church and a monastery, and then had cleared an even larger area which they had planted with sugar cane. They had also built a little sugar factory with a chimney fifty feet high and dammed a little stream and made it drive a water-wheel for a mill.

Their idea had been that the Indians should give up their wandering life as hunters and fishers, and settle down as peaceable agriculturalists and supply the monks' sugar factory with canes. However, as so often happens, the Indians had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. They killed the monks and continued to roam the forests.

To-day, you need a sharp eye to find the monastery, the church and the factory. As always, when man takes a piece of ground from it, the jungle withdraws and patiently lies in wait. At the least sign of weakness, it returns and takes possession again of what it had once lost. Then it is as though nothing had happened. That is what it was like here. The lianas had forced their way through the windows of the church and had broken the arches of the roof that now lay on the floor of the church as heaps of rubble. The high altar was gay with wild orchids and its pillars had fallen over.

Creepers had gained access through cracks in the wall, and tall trees grown up in the sacristy. Beneath what was once the pulpit and down in the crypt, furry bats hung side by side.

You could hardly see a stone. It was all a luxuriant green.

High over the bushes rose a slender tree with a spreading leafy top. Its trunk was perfectly straight—for this was the sugar factory's chimney—that four or five fig trees have clasped and climbed in corkscrew turns to spread out their crests there where the chimney stops.

If you did not know its history you would never dream of looking for a chimney beneath that rugged bark. But look a little closer and you will discover that the creepers have not covered over the cleaning trap. Its rusty iron-work still frames the black hole near the foot of the





chimney that gives access to the inside. This must be the only tree in the world that has a flue for cleaning.

The history of Amazonas is really just this story of constant struggle between man and the jungle. And up till now the jungle has won nearly every round. Somehow you can't help thinking about this when of an evening you sit sprawled in a wicker chair in the "American Bar" watching the arc lights along the avenida quivering like the restless lights of the unreal world of a film studio.

Manaos is fighting tooth and claw to maintain itself in its outpost so far from civilization, and it does everything it can to preserve the illusion of prosperity from the days when it imported French girls and champagne by the shipload. To-day, it is beer, not champagne: thin, expensive beer. And the French girls who did not get away are now slovenly women with straggling hair keeping doubtful drinking places in dreary side streets.

I met one of them one evening when I went out with an English stoker who amused people by eating razor blades and biting bits out of glasses, and doing a Russian dance at the same time. She had only one tooth in her upper jaw. It was long and yellow. She was wearing down-at-heel bedroom slippers with violets embroidered on them. She had a long, thin neck and a body like a beer barrel. Even at a distance, she stank of cheap rum and patchouli. There were some fans above a whatnot, and paper flowers round the chandelier just as in the cathedral.

The moment I told her that I came from Denmark, she ceased to take any interest in the other clients of her "Pension de Famille" who, needless to say, were quite able to look after themselves. She wept on my shoulder,

ruining my tropical jacket with her rouge. Then she stood up and went into a side room from which she fetched a tinted photograph of a young woman in the dress that was fashionable at the turn of the century with swelling bosom, feather boa and wasp waist. That girl, she said, was she. She was standing leaning on a gilt flower-stand. That was how she had looked when she had appeared in the circus at Copenhagen in 1904.

She had been a ballet dancer. And she told me how the Copenhagen newspapers had praised her technique. Born in Trieste, brought up in Paris, she had gone to Manaos when the rubber frenzy was at its height. They had bathed her in champagne. She had driven behind a four-in-hand and had had her own box at the opera. Forty-two years it was since the Copenhagen press had *praised her dancing and compared her to a snow-flake*.

This all came tumbling out in French along with tears that made furrows in her wrinkled cheeks. Then suddenly she said in Danish: "I have forgotten," but the tragic thing was that she hadn't. The gods had not shown her even that much mercy when they had cast her out.

Beside us a trio was thumping out hectic samba rhythms. Women were shrieking ecstatically: young women, such as men would have bathed in champagne if times had been different, young women with all their own white teeth. Young girls strolled to and fro past the table, their long cheap silk dresses trailing through the spilled dregs of beer on the floor. The Englishman had collapsed in a corner and lay there snoring. One corner of his mouth was bleeding and in his hand he held a glass out of which he had bitten a semi-circle.

The old, toothless hetaera's sweaty hand grasped my



arm convulsively as she bade me give greetings to a man in Copenhagen, a man who once was well-known, but now has been dead these many years. But I didn't dare tell her that.

And then there was a customs officer, one of those men whose glass ought to have been filled with champagne instead of with the wretched beer with which he moistened his indisputable talent. I met him in the "American Bar." As I was a newcomer and so did not know his repertoire, he fastened on to me the very first evening. He was considered more or less crazy and had been for twenty years. He was to be found in either the "American Bar" or in "Leiteria Amazonas," which later means "Amazon Dairy," a name which was a complete misnomer, as you will readily understand.

This customs officer could crow exactly like a cock, and he did so every two minutes. But people never even turned their heads. After all, he had been crowing for twenty years. In between he sang arias from the operas. He seemed to know them all and he sang in tune. If requested, he would also sing Toselli's *Serenade* or *Santa Lucia*, but with the deepest disdain. Another trick of his was to play the trombone on his thumb, and it was always the one tune—"You Never Know." Occasionally he would get right away from that sort of parlour trick and recite Lafontaine's fables in French.

If anyone was a Bohemian, it was my friend the customs officer in Manaos. He had a very strict drinking system: one beer per aria, fable or trombone solo. The crowing was just thrown in, or if you like, art for art's sake. It was understood that we others supplied the beer, and there would be an awkward pause in the conversation



if a bottle due should be slow in coming. But that didn't often happen.

The large plaza up by the opera is the army's parade ground. These were all recruits and none of them yet properly equipped or trained. Some had a more or less complete uniform, but most marched about in their shirt sleeves wearing shirts of various colours and every conceivable type of trousers. But all the same, each had a rifle and webbing equipment.

The square in front of the opera is an imposing place. It is completely paved with marble mosaic and in the centre stands a huge monument symbolizing the four great continents with which Manaus was linked in its heyday. The monument was raised when the harbour was inaugurated, at which time the ships of all nations lay side by side out in the river waiting for their rubber. Nowadays, a Booth line boat steals up once a month for a meagre cargo of the jungle's products, and is well able to deal with most of Manaus' exports.

Life in Manaus is appallingly dear. Prices are far higher than in southern civilized Brazil. The most unassuming bar at a street corner charges twice as much for a bottle of beer as a first-class restaurant in Rio de Janeiro, and the taxi metres register five shillings before the taxi even starts. In Rio or Sao Paulo you can drive all round the city for five or six shillings. All other prices are in that proportion, but then everything has to be brought such an interminably long way, and the percentage of wastage during transport is large.

Everything reminds you that the north is the step-child of Brazil, that the two large jungle states, Para and Amazon, are hardly regarded as belonging to the family.



It was international adventurers who brought chaos into the age-old peace of the jungle, who hunted the Indians through the jungle, and brought men from the coast to die of fever along its muddy rivers. Brazil itself was hardly aware of what was happening before it was all over and nothing but the debts remained. That was not a pleasant situation for a country that had trouble enough to develop even those states in which good natural conditions existed.

Thus, there is bitterness in the south and disappointment in the north. Several times already there has been talk of the north separating and forming a jungle republic, it being hoped that if that were done, the cattle kings of Marajo and the timber barons of Belem would take to living where their money was earned and spend it there instead of in Rio which would still flourish without them.

Nature has favoured the south and the government coddles the southern states. They are given roads, railways, modern factories, schools and hospitals. The north gets next to nothing. It is the Cinderella, or so they say in Belem and Manaus, and that is why they talk idly of a northern republic cut off along a line a little to the south of Bahia, which would be the capital, or if not Bahia, then Belem.



They have day-dreams too, dreams of the day when the world will have exhausted its present sources of oil and men will have to come and drill for it in the jungles of the Amazon. And there is oil there. Both the Brazilians and the Americans say that. Yet, as long as man can get what he needs elsewhere, he will avoid the Amazon jungle with its countless difficulties and dangers.

When in the end the bulldozers begin clearing the endless green jungle that stretches from the Atlantic to

the Andes, the largest unexploited area in the world, Belem will once again come into the limelight and become as important a town as Shanghai or New Orleans, and Manaus will again be in the enviable position of a spider sitting in the middle of its jungle web. Perhaps the curtain will even go up again in the great opera house there.

The pessimists, however, maintain that that will never happen; that the difficulties of clearing the jungle are far too great.

At the Cruzeiro do Sul's office they told me that the 'plane for Sao Paulo and Rio would start at 4.45 a.m. and that it normally took a quarter of an hour to drive out to the aerodrome.

Friends advised me to start in good time, for the rainy season had begun and there was no knowing what state the road to the aerodrome would be in if it should happen to rain all night.

It rained from ten o'clock that evening and never stopped. And when it rains in Manaus—but what's the use, you wouldn't believe me.

At 4.20 a.m. the chauffeur drove up in the pitch dark. The noise of his horn woke both me and the chambermaid who should have called me at 3.30. But my luggage was ready packed and in my pocket lay the little yellow carnet that entitled me to a seat in the 'plane for its 2800 miles flight to Rio de Janeiro.

The rain had stopped. Ten minutes' drive outside the town we braked sharply as the beam of our headlights lighted up a group of people standing in the road with suit cases in their hands. A man in uniform stepped forward and stopped us. There were three or four cars standing on the fringe.





"You can't get any farther," said the man in uniform. "If your passenger will get out he can wait here with the others. The road on from here is quite impassable. We have sent for a couple of lorries with caterpillar tracks to take the passengers to the aerodrome."

"Not *my* passenger," said my driver clenching his teeth on the stump of his cigarette.

"People *have* tried to get through," said the man in uniform.

"Not with *my* car," said my driver, and trod on the self-starter.

Then he put the car into first gear. The other drivers shouted at him that he was crazy. Perhaps he was, but he knew his car. His attitude to it was that of a cavalry officer to his horse. He talked to it, soothed it; he swore and whistled through his teeth as he swung the steering wheel backwards and forwards. We progressed sideways, skidding. The engine roared, and the body shook as though it were a racing motor-boat. I was thrown alternately against the sides and the roof. And all the time the driver sat there with an adoring grin on his face exclaiming: "What a car! What a car! How I love it!"

It took a quarter of an hour, but we got through. The car was covered in mud from its radiator to the petrol tank and from the hubs to the roof.

The driver never even looked at me, didn't even help me get my luggage out of the car, but at once began singing his car's praises to the gaping officials of the airport who had gathered round when they heard that an ordinary car had got through.

I was asked for a fare that was easily twice the tariff, but I knew that I had to do with an artist, a genius, and

I made it a fat round figure with a tip for which I didn't even get a thank you. But then the man was still full of the drive and of his love for his car, and at that moment he was quite indifferent to money. Had I hesitated for a second, or tried to protest, he would have turned his back on me and refused to take anything at all—and I didn't want that sort of leave-taking.

Besides, I was now half an hour ahead of the others, which meant that I could clear my luggage through the customs and be sure of getting a good seat in the 'plane before the others came pouring in.

A D.C.3 was standing there in the darkness with its engine ticking over. A steward was stowing lunch parcels and a huge thermos flask aboard. The sky was still overcast, but it looked as though there might be no more rain for a while.

Then the sun rose. To begin with, it had only a tiny round hole in the clouds to peep through, low down on the eastern horizon. It hung there like an evil red eye shining in the cold blue-grey light that lay over the aerodrome, the jungle and the rest of the sky.

A pair of screeching parrots flew flapping low above the little wooden hut from which the luggage was driven out to the 'plane on a trailer. Then we started, roared down the runway, left the cement, shot low across the fringe of the jungle, climbed higher and circled over the sleeping town.

When we reached 3000 feet, we could see the heart of the world's mightiest river system spread out below us; Rio Negro, Rio Madeira, and the Amazon.

Six thousand five hundred feet.

From that height the jungle was like a green leaf ribbed with the three great rivers which sent their tribu-





taries large and small branching out to either side.

Ten thousand feet.

Now the clouds had gone, and we could see far and wide on all sides. Nowhere was there any variety in the view, neither mountain nor bare patches.

We followed the Rio Madeira southwards. The jungle beneath us was like a piece of dark green crêpe paper, or an interminable quilted cover. There wasn't a road, not a town.

Clouds came up and we went above them. Far, far below us we could see the roofs of some Indians' round straw huts looking like faded yellowy-grey spots.

Small white clouds were drifting lazily across the jungle. From high up they looked as though they were resting right on the tree tops. There seemed to be a certain system in their arrangement, as though they were blobs of cotton wool on invisible threads in a shop window decorated for Christmas.

We were flying at 200 miles an hour, but at that height we seemed to be just crawling.

Jungle and clouds, clouds and jungle. And then the muddy line of the river twisting through that carpet of green. And youngsters talk of crossing that jungle on foot! It has never been done and never will be done. Expeditions follow the rivers.

A smiling steward offered us fragrant coffee and cigarettes. The service on the Cruzeiro do Sul's planes is good. Then the wireless operator came with his typewritten morning papers.

A spoilt little child in a pink silk dress and short socks snapped at its mother, and ten thousand feet beneath us was jungle that has never been explored. The small clearings in it have been made by Indians who



have never seen a white man. The steward strikes a match for your cigarette and you read in the paper that it is hoped soon to be able to fly as fast as sound.

An Allied Air Force 'plane on the normal Natal-U.S.A. route had made a forced landing in a little clearing in the jungle some time before. Two of the crew were found lying beside the 'plane. They were well picked skeletons. The pilot was jammed in the cockpit. He had no head.

There was a couple with three children on board. The little girl with the short socks was theirs. I wouldn't like to make a forced landing in the Amazon jungle wearing short socks.

Then there was another couple. The man looked typically Portuguese, though he might have been a German. He was thin and æsthetic; a missionary, perhaps. Then there were a couple of elderly ladies and a young girl going to Sao Paulo; and a boy of fourteen travelling alone to a boarding school in the same city, 2300 miles from his home and parents in Manaus. He looked sad and was wearing a mourning band. He had been seen off at the aerodrome by two young girls in black and an elderly man, so perhaps he had been home for his mother's funeral.

There was also a fat negress convulsively clutching a basket. You could see at once that she and the missionary couple were making their first trip. The boy had obviously flown many times, and so had the commercial traveller. He couldn't have been anything but a commercial traveller, because so far he hadn't yet looked out of the window.

Apart from these, there were the two pilots, the wireless operator and the steward. The steward had been in



the States to learn to fly, but he had crashed a 'plane trying to show off to his girl, so they had chucked him out. Now he was having to start from the beginning again and was doing two or three months as steward before going to Cruzeiro do Sul's private training school.

Of those who crashed in the jungle, the English fliers were the only ones who had ever been found. In Manaus they had told me that during the war, ninety machines on the U.S.A.-Natal-Dakar route had been lost. Some had been big B.29's and others large troop-carriers with forty men on board. Two men had come alive out of the jungle. *Two* men from ninety aeroplanes!

The children were munching biscuits and had already grown tired of looking out of the window. Not that there was much to look at. Hour after hour the landscape was uniformly the same.

Now and again a river would send us a vivid gleam as the sunlight struck it at a certain angle. They were like signals from some weird heliograph. The shadows of the low drifting small clouds were the only things to introduce a little variety into the uniform green expanse below us, that from our height looked so even and soft that you could well imagine a pilot in distress conceiving the idea of trying to land on its green carpet.

The clouds drove across it like lazy flocks of sheep. Our Lord's sheep on the devil's jungle.

Every now and again you could suddenly see a strip of jungle of quite a different shade of green. The country was the same, the height the same, so the alterations in colour must have been due to some freak chemical composition of the soil which favoured a certain kind of tree.

At long intervals there would be a sudden patch of pure jade green—a swamp—or a stretch of meadow with





And so back to Rio de Janeiro and civilization



fresh grass, or a lake covered with rushes. It was impossible to make out what they were from the height at which we were flying.

And then there were the rivers. The devil alone could understand them. The country was as flat as a pancake and there should have been nothing to prevent them following a straight line. But instead, they twisted and twirled in such fantastic hairpin bends that sometimes it looked as though they were trying to write us a message in some weird Inca alphabet.

The little girl with the short socks had a pink flower on either shoulder. Her mother was now trying to amuse her by making a mouse out of a pocket handkerchief. I used to be able to do that.

The commercial traveller had fallen asleep over a book. We had become so accustomed to the drone of the engines that we no longer noticed it.

Hour after hour passed. And each hour was 200 miles.

The steward came round with ice-cold orange juice.

It was in the jungle down there that Colonel Fawcett disappeared. Nor was he the only one. Members of the Boundary Commission and of various scientific expeditions have also disappeared without trace down there, but none received such publicity as Fawcett. All they got was a few lines in a terse report to some ministry in Rio. And they all clung to the rivers. To try to traverse the jungle on foot would be like trying to hack your way through a thorn hedge a thousand miles thick.

Then we began to lose height. The negress looked anxiously out of the window. The missionary and his wife were swallowing violently. His Adam's apple was going up and down under his greyish skin, making him



look like an ostrich trying to swallow a billiard ball. Then he folded his hands and shut his eyes.

The commercial traveller woke up, twiddled a beringed finger in one ear, turned to me and, pointing downwards, said :

"Porto Velho!"

Down there on the bank of the river was a collection of small houses clustered round a church. So that was Neil Brink's town. That was where Willy Andersen had spent the best of his youth working on the Madeira-Marmore railway that was already a useless bit of the past.

We circled once. When we were five or six hundred feet off the ground, I suddenly caught sight of a strip of light green looking as though someone had driven a mowing-machine through a short stretch of jungle. That was the aerodrome of Porto Velho. It consists of a single grass runway just broad enough for the 'plane to fit between the two walls of the jungle, and so short that the thought that you were not only to land, but also to take off again, gave you a nasty feeling in the pit of your stomach.

Such are the aerodromes of the jungles. However, we landed safe and sound and taxied up to a primitive little wooden building. The door was flung open and a wave of heat swept into the cabin. The heat was so great that it made your cheek smart, and when we walked down the steps to stretch our legs, it was like going into an oven.

Four negroes rolled some drums of petrol up to the 'plane and began pumping it into our tank. Sweat was pouring down their naked, shiny backs and glistening in the sun as though it were oil. The three children and their parents got out here. The little girl flung herself



round the neck of an elderly woman waiting in the shade of a wooden hut. No one was to take their place. Then we went aboard again and taxied right out to the end of the runway, stopping for a while to let some zebu oxen waddle past along an earthen track. The pilot had to stop the engines to avoid making the oxen into mince before their time.

The 'plane tore down the runway, passed the wooden building—ye gods! will it never take off! Then, just as the trees seemed no more than ten yards away and an accident inevitable, we were airborne and climbing at an angle sharp enough to be felt unpleasantly in the region of the stomach. Bushes and trees bowed in our slipstream.

The commercial traveller and I looked involuntarily at each other and nodded, and our hearts dropped back into their usual places. The novices seemed quite unmoved. A good man, the pilot!

Soon, Porto Velho's black vultures were circling far beneath us. Then the small white lamb-like clouds that had been following us so faithfully began to grow bigger. They swallowed each other up, swelled, and gradually turned into large mastodons. But they were still white, and there were still gaps in them through which we could see the jungle. Towards the east, however, there was a wall of black cloud fringed with grey. Thunder clouds.

Were they on our course? It looked like it. We went higher and higher. My temples began to throb. It became more difficult to breathe and the least movement was an effort. You had to lift your shoulders and work your chest muscles just to fill your lungs. It was getting chilly in the cabin and the men began buttoning up their





jackets. The missionary reached up and took his overcoat from the rack. The steward who knew I was a foreigner and had seen from the passenger list that I was a journalist, came up to me and whispered, "Fourteen thousand feet." So, we were trying to get above the weather.

The big white clouds were now far beneath us, except for one towering up every now and then like an arm trying to pluck us down. Occasionally, we cut through the top of one and were shrouded momentarily in thick white mist. Then the 'plane jolted and dropped a bit. It was like driving over a bad road.

The novices were glancing nervously at their neighbours and at the steward, as though reproaching him for the clouds. But the steward just smiled and joked about it. The commercial traveller and I picked up our books and buried ourselves in them. That should make the novices feel more comfortable. Yet we were not altogether happy about the black wall ahead that was towering up higher and higher.

Then the steward came with our lunch packets. They looked most inviting. Each sandwich was packed separately in transparent cellophane. And so at fourteen thousand feet we ate, as the 'plane hopped from cloud to cloud: one liver paste sandwich, one cheese sandwich, a fat, well roasted duck's drum-stick, as tender as butter and with crinkly skin; a fillet of fish and a hard-boiled egg lying carefully peeled in a bag; then a wonderful little cake, a piece of caramel pudding and a gigantic banana. With this we had mineral water and fragrant coffee from the big thermos flask, and of course, a cigarette or strong Bahia cigar with the coffee.



We wiped our mouths with a fine white table napkin

and looked somnolently out of the window at jungle where the white man has never set his foot. God knows what the Indians, those stone age men, were thinking down there at that moment?

How lovely the 'plane must look as it emerges into a gap in the clouds glinting like silver in the sunshine, like some fantastic moth!

Was prehistoric man down there cowering in the darkest corner of his hut? Was he clasping his woman and child to him in frenzied terror of the roaring bird of prey whose shadow was moving across his little clearing? Or had he grown accustomed to its regular passage? Or was he at that moment standing shooting arrow after arrow up at us?

Then suddenly we got something else to think about. The thunder clouds had come threateningly close. In the little steel frame above the door into the pilot's cabin, the light went up behind the notice "Fasten Your Safety Belts." We looked at the plan. We had only been flying two and a half hours since leaving Porto Velho and were a long way yet from the next place where we were to land. And, besides, the lower half of the notice board forbidding smoking had not been lit up as was done when the 'plane was preparing to land. In other words, there was no way of avoiding the black clouds ahead. We were running head first into a tropical thunderstorm.

The steward went round collecting the empty lunch packets. As he came to me, he whispered: "Temporal, Senhor!"

And then it came, inevitable, like a shock.

The next moment it was as though Hell had loosed all its baying hounds to hunt our little silver-grey machine across the jungle in a sort of grim catch-as-catch-can. If



the Indian down below could have seen us, he would have grinned exultantly and thought that one of his arrows had hit the devilish bird which was now tumbling round in the air mortally wounded.

But he could not see us, for the clouds had closed round us and the rain was pouring down the window-panes as though we were going through a waterfall. We could not even see the tips of the wings and the earth below us was completely blotted out. The strong sunlight that before had flooded the cabin, had been replaced by a bluish twilight; but then the darkness was slashed by a blinding flash that made our eyes smart. One or two of the passengers screamed.

While we were still rubbing our eyes, the storm seized upon and shook the 'plane, like a bulldog with a cat. Then it let go and dropped us, and we fell heavily and lopsidedly like a dead weight in a vacuum, until we were brought up by something with a mighty jerk that made our belts cut into our thighs.

For a moment the machine seemed to be standing still; then it dropped again, received a fresh jolt, shot upwards and heeled over quivering on one side, righted itself, was shoved forward violently, thrust upwards with a fierce jerk, thrown on its nose and plunged downwards to receive a violent blow on the side and then be shot up vertically with one plane pointing straight down.

All the cups and bottles on the shelves in the steward's pantry tumbled on to the floor and began rolling backwards and forwards down the gangway in the centre. A jug of coffee fell over, the lid came off and the coffee spilled forward under the seats to be sent swirling back again by the next jolt.



The steward was busy in the passenger's cabin, where the women were shrieking. The commercial traveller and I smiled at each other—but this time our smiles were very forced.

Bottles, glasses, jugs, boxes and cases were leaping about the floor in a furious can-can. What an idiot the steward was not to have stowed them properly. He sent us a beseeching glance: wouldn't we undo our belts and try to bring a little order into the chaos.

In a storm it is much more difficult to keep your balance in an aeroplane than it is on the deck of a ship, for you haven't the least chance of anticipating the next movement. Waves at least follow a certain system, but the air is quite incalculable.

And down there below us was the jungle.

I ran head first into the door of the w.c. and sat down on the coffee-covered floor. I was wearing my only decent suit—a light grey one.

One after the other, the brown paper bags were being brought into use. The missionaries wife was lying across her husband's knees, retching. He was praying, the knuckles showing white on his clasped hands.

Then the old negress lost her head. She undid her belt, flopped on her knees in the gangway and clutched the steward round the knees, screaming like a stuck pig. The screams were punctuated with mechanical groans of "Jesus Christus! Jesus Christus!"

Lightning was flaring all around us.

The steward took hold of the old woman's wrists and forced her to her feet, then he thrust her into her seat, collapsing on top of her, and somehow managed to fasten her down, but she fought like a savage to get up again.





"Jesus Christus! Jesus Christus!"

The second pilot stuck his head through the door to see how we were faring on, but shut it again hastily when he saw what was going on. His expression was that of a peaceable little man who has inadvertently got mixed up in a private fight. So the steward had to struggle alone—with the soothing, professional smile laid down in the "Regulations for Stewards, paragraph 16," fixed on his face.

The whole thing was certainly far from pleasant however old a hand one was at flying. An electrical storm in the tropics is not a thing pilots joke about even when they have landed.

The clouds were like the wild mustangs of the pampa, kicking and bumping with their sharp hooves at the thin metal sides of the 'plane.

The pilot felt his way through the lightning-riven darkness: climbing, dropping, searching for a calmer layer of air, and ended by going right down almost to the level of the treetops. We suddenly saw the jungle beneath us like a huge cloud dashing past at a furious speed.

The 'plane did not leap so violently down there and slowly peace returned to the cabin. Soon it was no worse than it had been at the beginning, just like driving a car over a bad road. Even the old negress had calmed down and was looking round rather ashamedly. The steward went round with a cloth mopping up.

Then the rain slackened. The black clouds slipped astern, and the 'plane began to climb again.

Half an hour later we landed on a runway the twin of that at Port Velho. While the petrol was being pumped in, we gulped down a cup of strong coffee and

stretched our legs. As we walked about the soft grass we tried to tell each other that it had really been an interesting experience. But it hadn't.

We had now crossed the boundary of Matto Grosso. The next time we would land would be in Cuiaba, capital of the province, and there we were to spend the night. But we couldn't go on, as Cuiaba was refusing to accept us owing to a thunderstorm there, and our halt, normally a quarter of an hour, was extended to an hour. Then the wireless operator came out and told us that we had permission to proceed.

Cuiaba is the farthest outpost of civilization in the west, an advance post in the wilderness whose inhabitants try to live as the white man should. In Cuiaba, as in Manaos, this means wearing collar and tie, being hopelessly narrow-minded, and damning all who think or act differently from the majority. For the official or officer, Cuiaba is a place of banishment, but to the cattlemen of the province, it is the epitome of civilization. It has a cinema and a hotel.

We stayed at the hotel. It was full up and I was allotted a maid's room in the top storey which I had to share with the commercial traveller, who proved to be a diamond merchant on his way from Boa Vista on the Rio Branco to Rio with a nice collection of precious stones in a little cardboard box.

He was a German emigrant. The pogroms had cost the lives of six of his family, and although his English was very hesitant, he refused to talk German. And he spoke a lot and very quickly, as people do whose nerves are at breaking point or who have something to hide. At home in Mainz, he had made a living out of agricultural



implements, but here he was buyer for his uncle's firm—London and Rio de Janeiro.

He had all Brazil for his territory and had had the pleasure of holding the largest diamond to be found in the country in the hollow of his hand. This was the 726.5 carat "President Vargas" that was sold to a diamond dealer in New York, who cut it up into twenty-seven smaller stones and lost 100,000 dollars by doing so, because the "President" proved to be tawny—and there's nothing more degrading you can say about a diamond.

There are diamond deposits in nine of Brazil's twenty-one States, but in only very few places are they properly mined. The great majority of the stones are found by poor roaming *garimpeiros*, or diamond seekers, who work with a primitive washing-pan in the rivers when the dry season has shrunk them to a mere stream in a broad bed of sand.

Boa Vista, from which he had come, was a veritable Wild West town. It had a French barber, a Hungarian baker, negro washerwomen from French Guiana, and the rest of the population is made up of English, Russians, Americans, Jamaican negroes, Syrians, Turks, &c. Every language under the sun is spoken there, and on occasions, the revolver joins in.

Drunkenness is its occupational disease.

The whisky served in the hotel was national and undrinkable, the soda-water warm, so we went out to have a look at the town. Matto Grosso is the largest cattle State in Brazil. There would seem to be a lot of money in cattle for Cuiaba is clean and smart, and even the huts of the cabocles right out in the suburbs were well-kept and looked habitable.

Large herds of cattle were being driven into the market-place, a huge square surrounded by low houses. The gauchos were settling down for the night in small clusters, rolling cigarettes between their brown fingers and loosening their belts. They would throw their poncho round their shoulders and take a nose-bag or a truss of hay for their pillow.

The shops reflected the local industry. There were countless saddlers' shops, their windows filled with tempting leather goods to entice the gaucho come to town. The gaucho loves luxuriantly tooled leather with a wealth of heavy silver mountings, and his dream is to have a revolver belt with shiny brass studs, and for his horse a silver bit and a head-band worthy of a Rajah's elephant. You could buy wonderful plaited riding whips, and half-length riding boots pointed in front and cut away at the back that were made of the softest, finest calf-skin and drooped in countless folds over the ankle. These, the baggy *bomba*, the broad-brimmed flat hat and the garish handkerchief, are the caste-mark of the gaucho all over South America whether the steppe from which he comes is called *pampa* or *campos*.

There were plenty of pure Indian faces to be seen among the sun-tanned men lounging in front of the bars or arguing at the street corners.

We went early to bed. The diamond merchant took his precious little box from his suitcase and put it in the breast pocket of his pyjamas. Then he pulled out a Smith and Weston and laid it on his night table. We turned out the light and dropped asleep.

Apart from our being eaten alive by midges, nothing happened during the night except when the door suddenly creaked on its hinges and then opened slowly, so





slowly it seemed it would never stop moving. But it did, and a dark shape crept across the floor making for my bed.

This was the boots come to shut off the water supply to the hotel. The taps were just above my pillow.

At four o'clock we were called, and by the time the sun rose we were already on our way. In the pale morning light, we discovered that the country beneath had changed. The jungle was no longer supreme, but now had to share with the plain. And whereas before the whole country had been flat, ridges now protruded here and there, and these turned into hills that were covered with grass and as rugged as the molars of a beast of prey. Behind the town the hills rose up into a cone-shaped peak.

The plain gradually became the dominating feature of the landscape. Seen from above, it was like a mighty green lake with scattered wooded islands shaped like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.



Then we flew over half a score of small lakes lying strangely close together in the middle of the plain. There seemed no reason for them to be there, and, though of different sizes, they were all perfectly round. Their water was as clear as crystal so that you could see the bottom, except in the middle which was dark like the bull's eye of a target. And they had neither inlet nor outlet. Were these the traces of a shower of giant meteors?

Five minutes later we had forgotten them, for the country beneath us was constantly changing. We could now begin to see roads, primitive tracks that followed the contours of the land just as a river does.

Then we were flying over a *meseña* country, in which

steep hills suddenly shoot up and form large plateaus which must have been almost inaccessible for there wasn't a sign of life to be seen on them. But down in the plain we could see herds of cattle slowly drifting along as they grazed. Here and there the mesetas joined to form long chains of hills that continued parallel to each other running straight north and south as far as we could see from the aeroplane.

How I wished I was a geologist. What an exciting story those hills and lakes must have been able to tell of the creation of South America.

The diamond merchant prodded my shoulder and pointed downwards where an insignificant little town lay on the banks of a river. There was the richest deposit of diamonds in all South America. Every year it sends some twenty thousand carats of fine quality diamonds of good colour and size on to the world's market.

At twenty minutes past eight, we landed at Aragarças to refuel. The country was still half wild, but something at least had been done to tame it. There were primitive bridges over the dirty yellow rivers that sped along with here and there the white patch of a waterfall or rapids.

Down below was the Parahyba, large tributary of the La Plata, making its way south-west towards Paraguay and Buenos Aires.

Another landing—Ubareba. We were now in Minas Geraes. The airport was no longer a wooden shack, but a fine stone building white-washed a dazzling white. The negroes no longer rolled the petrol drums out to the 'plane, but drove up in a fine red tank-lorry, and they were wearing caps with gold braid on them. There was a bar in the building and a boy in uniform served us



coffee without charge while we stretched our legs. There was a telephone, and six men standing ready beside a red fire-engine both when we landed and when we took off again. They stood in a line looking like a row of chorus girls.

Then we were in the air again flying over clouds that blotted out the view so that we could devote our undivided attention to the lunch basket provided by the Grande Hotel in Cuiaba. For more than an hour we flew above the clouds and then they disappeared as suddenly as they had come.

We were now flying over a new land, a different State. It might just as well have been in Europe or somewhere in the U.S.A. The jungle had vanished, the swamps disappeared, the broad plains and steep mesetas were no longer anywhere to be seen. The country below us was now like a rag rug made of odds and ends of all sorts of colours and sizes, with the emphasis on brown and green, the colours of sugar-cane ripe for harvest and of coffee plantations.

We were now above the rich State of Sao Paulo, where all the trees were planted in tidy rows and the *fazendas* had pretty white buildings with roofs of red tiles, and the cattle and horses were neatly segregated in square enclosures.

And there, far below us, a *train* was steaming along!

And there was Campinas for which the train was making, spread out beneath us like a map, its broad avenidas and straight streets arranged on the American rectangular plan.

Then we could see several towns at the same time. There were many cars on the roads, electricity pylons



and factory chimneys sticking up in ever greater numbers and white smoke billowing up from some cement works. Sao Paulo manufactures its own cumulus clouds and sends them drifting over its cultivated fields.

We made towards an aerodrome with long red runways, making it look like a spider's web, but now we were no longer alone in the air. Three other 'planes were circling slowly waiting for permission to land. And on the horizon was a city that after those months spent in the ghost towns of the Amazon was like a vision in a dream. Its slender white skyscrapers, the oval of a race-course, the tribunes of a giant stadium, the trams on its broad streets that were fringed with green trees, were like a fairy-tale. And beyond the city were mountains, the mountains of the Serra whose other side is washed by the blue Atlantic rollers.

And so we landed in Sao Paulo and plunged into a swarm of happy people, chattering in a great hall with telephone boxes and a bar of shining chromium plate. And then off again, over green hills and flat lakes, over a sparkling blue sea and glittering rivers.

We flew in over Rio at the hour of sunset, approaching on a level with the outstretched arms of the figure of Christ on Corcovado, circled round the Sugar Loaf and out over the islands in the bay.

There was the Copacabana Palace, there the Hotel Gloria. And there the end of the Avenida Rio Branco where it becomes the lovely extension to the Praca Paris.

Down and down, with the landing wheels coming out of their cases under the 'plane's body. We touched down gently, ran losing speed along a grey cement runway, turned and taxied up in front of the airport buildings



just as the street lamps and neon lights were turned on along the Avenida Beira Mar.

Two days later I was laid low by Amazon dysentery. Sometimes, you have to pay more than just the price of the ticket when you flirt with adventure.



